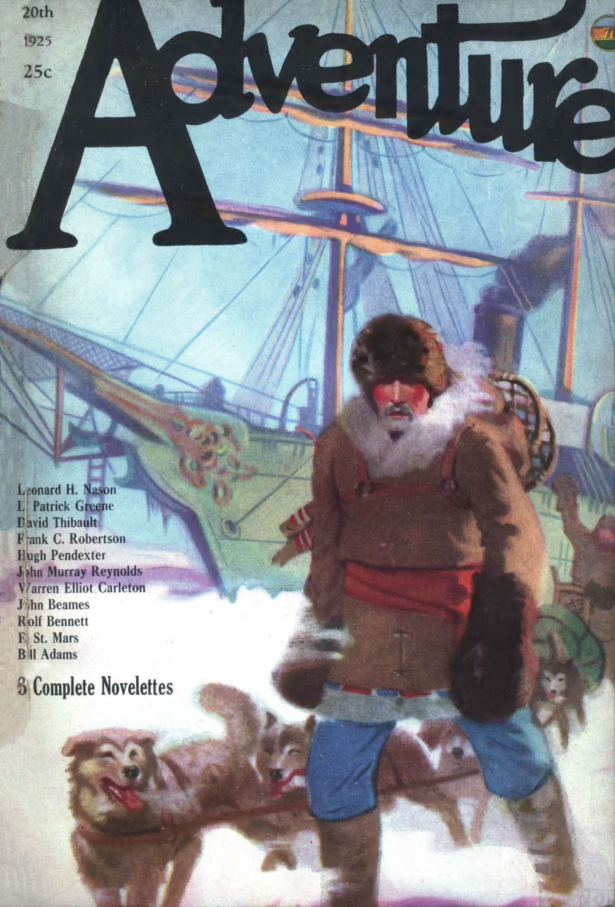

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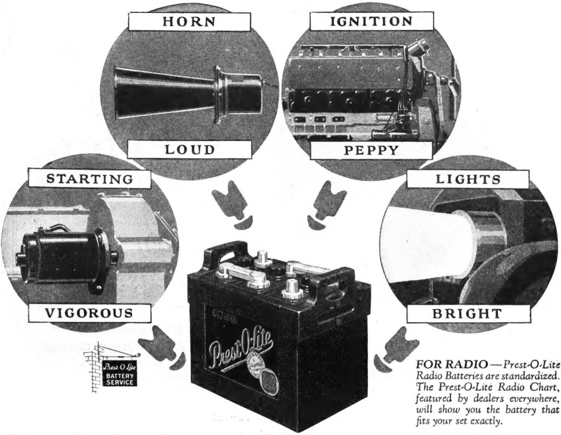

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Volume 53
Number 2

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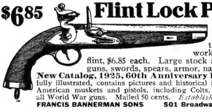

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**Occasionally one of our stories will be called an "Off-the-Trail" story, a warning that it is in some way different from the usual magazine stories, perhaps a little different, perhaps a good deal. It may violate a canon of literature or a custom of magazines, or merely be different from the type usually found in this magazine. The difference may lie in unusual theme, material, ending, or manner of telling. No question of relative merit is involved.*

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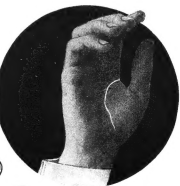
Headings . . . . **V. E. Pyles**

Cover Design . . . . **John Drew**

Statement of the ownership, management, circulation, etc., required by the Act of Congress of August 24, 1912, of *Adventure*, published three times per month at New York, N. Y., for April 1, 1925. State of New York, County of New York, *ss.* Before me, a Notary Public in and for the State and county aforesaid, personally appeared J. F. BIRMINGHAM, who, having been duly sworn according to law, deposes and says that he is the Business Manager of *Adventure* and that the following is, to the best of his knowledge and belief, a true statement of the ownership, management, etc., of the aforesaid publication for the date shown in the above caption, required by the Act of August 24, 1912, embodied in section 411, Postal Laws and Regulations, printed on the reverse of this form, to wit: 1. That the names and addresses of the publisher, editor, managing editor, and business managers are: Publisher, THE RIDGWAY COMPANY, a corporation, Spring and Macdougal Streets, New York City. Editor, ARTHUR SULLIVANT HOFFMAN, 223 Spring Street, New York City. Managing Editor, none. Business Manager, JAMES F. BIRMINGHAM, 223 Spring Street, New York City. 2. That the owner is: THE RIDGWAY COMPANY, a corporation, Spring and Macdougal Streets, New York City, whose stockholders are: THE FEDERAL PUBLISHING COMPANY, a corporation, 15 Exchange Place, Jersey City, N. J., whose stockholder is: THE BUTTERICK COMPANY, a corporation, Spring and Macdougal Streets, New York City, whose stockholders are: BLOCK MALONEY Co., 74 Broadway, New York City; CHISHOLM & CHAPMAN, 51 Broadway, New York City; S. R. LATSHAW, 223 Spring Street, New York City; NOYES & JACKSON, 42 Broadway, New York City; LAURA J. O'LOUGHLIN, 514 West 114th Street, New York City; MRS. ARETHUSA POND, 600 West 115th Street, New York City; CHARLES D. RAFFERTY as sole surviving successor trustee of the estate of WM. H. GELSHENEN deceased, 81 Fulton Street, New York City; WHITEHOUSE & CO., 111 Broadway, New York City; G. W. WILDER, 41 Fifth Avenue, New York City; C. D. WILDER, 223 Spring Street, New York City; B. F. WILDER, 601 West 113th Street, New York City; W. J. WOLLMAN & CO., 120 Broadway, New York City. 3. *That the known bondholders, mortgagees, and other security holders owning or holding* 1 *per cent. or more of total amount of bonds, mortgages, or other securities, are*: None. 4. That the two paragraphs next above, giving the names of the owners, stockholders, and security holders, if any, contain not only the list of stockholders and security holders as they appear upon the books of the company but also, in cases where the stockholder or security holder appears upon the books of the company as trustee or in any other fiduciary relation, the name of the person or corporation for whom such trustee is acting, is given; also that the said two paragraphs contain statements embracing affiant's full knowledge and belief as to the circumstances and conditions under which stockholders and security holders who do not appear upon the books of the company as trustees, hold stock and securities in a capacity other than that of a bona fide owner; and this affiant has no reason to believe that any other person, association, or corporation has any interest direct or indirect in the said stock, bonds, or other securities than as so stated by him. J. F. BIRMINGHAM, Business Manager. Sworn to and subscribed before me this 28th day of March, 1925. BLEVINS C. DUNKLIN, Notary Public. (New York County No. 341; Certificate filed in Bronx County No. 80. New York Reg. No. 5357; Bronx Reg. No. 198.) (*My commission expires March* 30, 1925.) (SEAL.) Form 3526—Ed. 1924.



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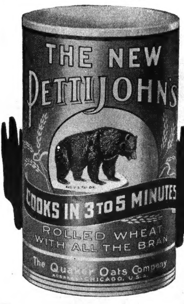

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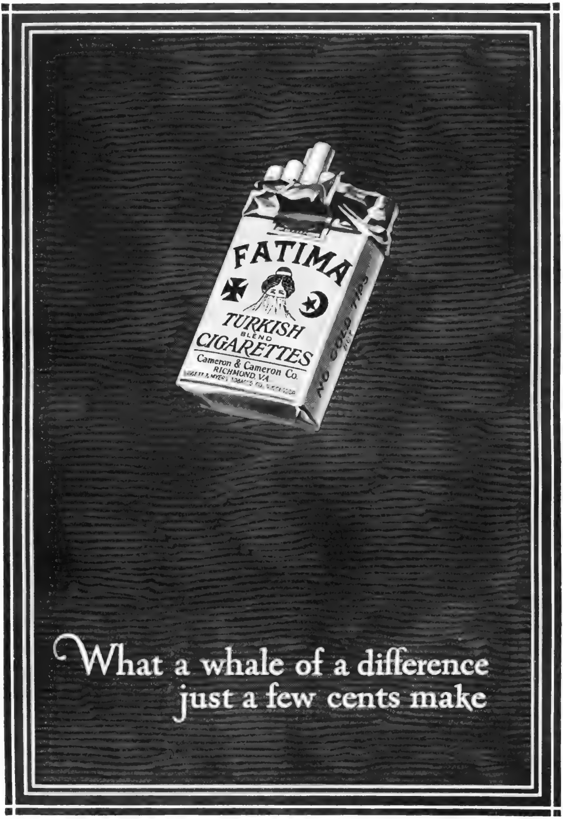
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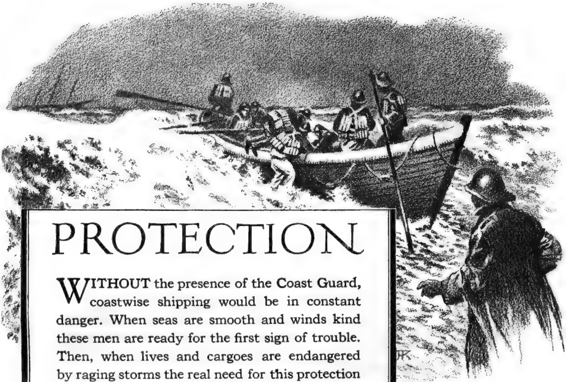

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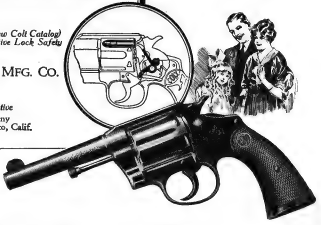

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Can You Guess This Man's Age?

See if You Can Tell Within 25 Years; The Author Couldn't; But He Stuck With Hobart Bradstreet Until He Revealed His Method of Staying Young

I USED to pride myself on guessing people's ages. That was before I met Hobart Bradstreet, whose age I missed by a quarter-century. But before I tell you how old he really is, let me say this:

My meeting up with Bradstreet I count the luckiest day of my life. For while we often hear how our minds and bodies are about 50% efficient—and at times feel it to be the truth—he knows *why*. Furthermore, he knows how to overcome it—in five minutes—and he showed me *how*.

This man offers no such bromides as setting-up exercises, deep-breathing, or any of those things you know at the outset you'll never do. He uses a principle that is the foundation of all chiropractic, naprapathy, mechano-therapy, and even osteopathy. Only he does not touch a hand to you; it isn't necessary.

The reader will grant Bradstreet's method of staying young worth knowing and using, when told that its originator (whose photograph reproduced here was taken a month ago) is sixty-five years old!

And here is the secret: *he keeps his spine a half-inch longer than it ordinarily would measure.*

Any man or woman who thinks just one-half inch elongation of the spinal column doesn't make a difference should try it! It is easy enough. I'll tell you how. First, though, you may be curious to learn why a full-length spine puts one in an entirely new class physically. The spinal column is a series of tiny bones, between which are pads or cushions of cartilage. Nothing in the ordinary activities of us humans stretches the spine. So it "settles" day by day, until those once soft and resilient pads become thin as a safety-razor blade—and just about as hard. One's spine (the most wonderfully designed shock-absorber known) is then an unyielding column that transmits every shock straight to the base of the brain.

Do you wonder folks have backaches and headaches? That one's nerves pound toward the end of a hard day? Or that a nervous system may periodically go to pieces? For every nerve in one's body connects with the spine, which is a sort of central switchboard. When the "insulation," or cartilage, wears down and flattens out, the nerves are exposed, or even impinged—and there is trouble on the line.

Now, for proof that sublaxation of the spine causes most of the ills and ailments which spell "age" in men or women. Flex your spine—"shake it out"—and they will disappear. You'll feel the difference in *ten minutes*. At least, I did. It's no trick to secure complete spinal laxation as Bradstreet does it. But like everything else, one must know how. No amount of violent exercise will do it; not even chopping wood. As for walking, or golfing, your spine settles down a bit firmer with each step.

Mr. Bradstreet had evolved from his 25-year experience with spinal mechanics a simple, boiled-down formula of just five movements. Neither takes more than one minute, so it means but five minutes a day. But those movements! I never experienced such compound exhilaration before. I was a good subject for the test, for I went into it with a dull headache. At the end of the second movement I thought I could actually feel my blood circulating. The third movement in this remarkable Spine-Motion series brought an amazing feeling of exhilaration. One motion seemed to open and shut my backbone like a jack-knife.

I asked about constipation. He gave me another motion—a peculiar, writhing and twisting movement—and fifteen minutes later came a complete evacuation!

Hobart Bradstreet frankly gives the full credit for his conspicuous success to these simple secrets of Spine-Motion. He has traveled about for years, conditioning those whose means permitted a specialist at their beck and call. I met him at the Roycroft Inn, at East Aurora. Incidentally, the late Elbert Hubbard and he were great pals; he was often the "Fra's" guest in times past. But Bradstreet, young as he looks and feels, thinks he has chased around the country long enough. He has been prevailed upon to put his **Spine-Motion** method in form that makes it now generally available.

HOBART BRADSTREET, THE MAN WHO DECLINES TO GROW OLD

I know what these remarkable mechanics of the spine have done for me. I have checked up at least twenty-five cases. With all sincerity I say nothing in the whole realm of medicine or specialism can quicker re-make, rejuvenate and restore one. I wish you could see Bradstreet himself. He is arrogantly healthy; he doesn't seem to have any nerves. Yet he puffs incessantly at a black cigar that would floor some men, drinks two cups of coffee at every meal, and I don't believe he averages seven hours' sleep. It shows what a sound nerve-mechanism will do. He says a man's power can and should be unabated up to the age of 60, in every sense, and I have had some astonishing testimony on that score.

Would you like to try this remarkable method of "coming back"? Or, if young, and apparently normal in your action and feelings, do you want to see your energies just about doubled? It is easy. No "apparatus" is required. Just Bradstreet's few, simple instructions, made doubly clear by his photographic poses of the five positions. Results come amazingly quick. In less than a week you'll have new health, new appetite, new desire, and new capacities; you'll feel years lifted off mind and body. This miracle-man's method can be tested without any advance risk. If you feel enormously benefited, everything is yours to keep and you have paid for it all the enormous sum of $3.00! Knowing something of the fees this man has been accustomed to receiving, I hope his naming $3.00 to the general public will have full appreciation.

The $3.00 which pays for everything is not sent in advance, nor do you make any deposit or payment on delivery. Try how it feels to have a full-length spine, and you'll henceforth pity men and women whose nerves are in a vise!

HOBART BRADSTREET, Suite 5565,
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I will try your Spine-Motion without risk if you will provide necessary instructions. Send everything postpaid, without any charge or obligation, and I will try it five days. If I find Spine-Motion highly beneficial I can remit just $3 in full payment; otherwise I will return the material and will owe you nothing.

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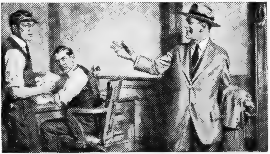

"Good-bye, Boys!"

"Today I dropped in for a last word with the boys at the office. And as I saw Tom and Dave there at the same old desk it came to me suddenly that they had been there just so the day I came with the firm four years ago.

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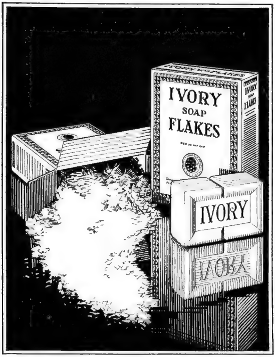

Damp towels are dangerous hamper companions

for chiffon stockings

When delicate silks are put in a hamper with the towels, sheets and colored cottons of the weekly wash, they wear out long before they have given the service you have reason to expect of them.

Why? Because, even though not obviously soiled, they contain perspiration acids from the skin, which are kept moist by the hamper dampness and destroy the silk fibres.

> *So, to preserve fragile garments and prolong the length of their service, many women have made it a habit to tub them in Ivory suds as soon as possible after they are worn, whether they* LOOK *soiled or not.*

In this way acid action and the fading and streaking that come from tossing such garments into stuffy hampers are all prevented. All delicate things reward this simple care with far longer life.

Of course, a soap that is the slightest bit too strong will spoil your whole effort by injuring the fabrics and colors.

Ivory (cake or flakes) is safe. For, as you know, Ivory has for 46 years protected the complexions of millions of women.

The best test we know of for determining the safety of any soap for delicate silks and woolens is this: Ask yourself, "Would I use it on my face?"

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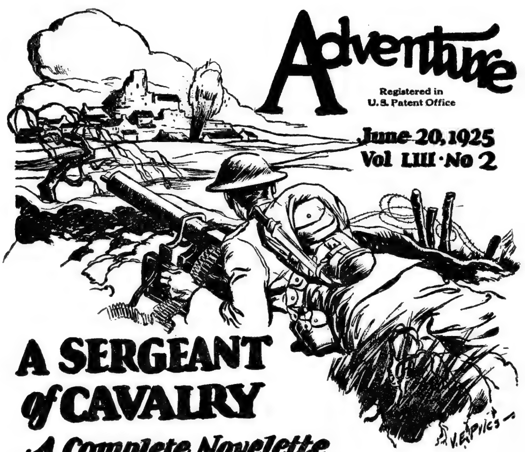

A SERGEANT of CAVALRY

A Complete Novelette

by LEONARD H. NASON

Author of "Eye-Wash," "The Casual's Return," etc.

IN THE midst of what appeared to be an old pasture was a small wooden house, one of the portable type such as one sees at summer resorts and on the fringes of great cities, where bank clerks and what-not are getting back to the land.

Before the door of the house was a line of men, waiting patiently. This house, however, was not a home, but the headquarters of a rest camp where men new-landed in France were taken to recuperate. They wore the olive drab of the United States Army, but though they were members of the American Expeditionary Force, they did not wear the overseas cap. They wore campaign hats, with hat-cords of yellow, thus showing that they belonged to a cavalry regiment.

These men were all unarmed, save one, who carried a rifle and had a pistol hung to his cartridge belt, which he wore in true cavalry fashion, around his hips, as a shimmy dancer wears a sash.

The men spat and shifted from one foot to the other, and gazed at the sky. They were prisoners, awaiting trial by the summary court, and the man with the rifle was guarding them. The men were sad and their eyes bloodshot. This was a Monday morning and the joy of Saturday or Sunday night had turned into a headache and a rebellious stomach. That which had soothed and exhilarated going down had not been as pleasant on its return journey. Therefore the men stood sullenly, said

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nothing to each other even in undertones, and cursed the tardy court.

The court had a throat and a head, as well as any one else, but the court had no husky sergeant of the guard to get him out of his bunk, hence he was late. Nor was his lateness due to dallying overlong with his breakfast. He had no more stomach for breakfast than had the prisoners.

Suddenly every head in the line went up. There was a stir among the men, but it was not a stir of stiffening to attention, but rather one of surprize. An imperceptible murmur rippled along the line.

"Cut out the talkin'," growled the guard, and ejected a yard of tobacco juice to show how unconcerned he was.

Two soldiers were approaching the line of men, both wearing the chevrons of sergeants. One wore a pistol and the other was unarmed. They came on, side by side, young men of about the same height, lithe and spare, as good cavalrymen should be.

Their blouses fitted them like their skins and the peg of their breeches was like that of a hemisphere. Those were good breeches, made by the troop tailor out of old-time overcoats, and stitched with yellow silk at the pockets. Their leggings were of the type that lace up the side, but of solid leather and so polished and shined that they glittered and cast little circles of light about each foot.

The two sergeants went past the line, never looking to right or left; and, having gone a little apart, halted and leaned against the side of the building, under one of the windows. The prisoners looked at them open-mouthed.

There was Sergeant Colburn of A Troop evidently a prisoner, and guarded by Sergeant Olsen, his buddy. They would have been less astonished to see their colonel under guard.

Sergeant Colburn was as fine a soldier as there was in the regiment, he was a crack horseman, and he wore the Mexican Expeditionary ribbon above the silver marksmanship medals that showed he was both rifle and pistol expert.

Yet here he was, waiting his trial, and under guard. This last was the most extraordinary thing, for non-commissioned officers are not placed in confinement nor under restraint except for the very gravest offenses.

Sergeant Colburn seemed to be the one who was least disturbed. He manufactured a cigaret and proceeded to smoke it with satisfaction. Sergeant Olsen looked at him intently and then, catching the other's eye, carried it to where the butt of Sergeant Olsen's pistol protruded from the Texas style holster, right within easy grasp of Sergeant Colburn's hand. Sergeant Colburn affected not to see it. The other sergeant coughed and repeated the performance, with no effect.

"Nell," said the sergeant's guard, "what's the matter with you? You blind or what? Can you see that gun or not? You ain't handcuffed!"

"Be yourself," grinned Colburn. "Don't every man in this regiment know we're buddies? Wanta serve my time for me? And while I was grabbin' your gun and makin' my getaway, what would that John from B Troop be doin'? He'd rather let a slug through me than be a lance jack."

"Nell," groaned the other sergeant, "whatever did you do it for? Why don't you ask 'em to put your trial over till the old man comes back? He'll fix things for you."

Before the other could answer, the guard with the rifle barked, "Attention!" and there was a stiffening of backs while the summary court, the commanding officer of the first squadron, walked past and entered the building.

The prisoners all looked at him intently as he passed. They noted that his eyes were slightly bloodshot, that his face was haggard, and that he spat what seemed to be a little piece of cotton as he went up the steps. Every one was expectorating that morning. The men's hearts sank.

Beneath the window the two sergeants heard the major enter the courtroom, grunt an answer to the clerk's good morning, throw his hat on the desk, kick his chair, and growl, "Send 'em along." Thereupon Nell Colburn spoke, in loud clear tones.

"I heard a rumor," said he, "that my troop was goin' up to the front and the front is no place for me. I like it too well right here in Camp Genicart. So I didn't see no other thing to do than to get put in the mill and for a good long stretch, and when I get out the war will be over."

"Shut up!" husked Sergeant Olsen, "he can hear you! That window's got paper in it in place of glass, don't yuh know that?"

The prisoner was immediately silent and answered his companion's look of horror with a wide grin.

ORDINARILY the sergeant would have been tried first, but in this case he was not and so waited until all the other men had filed in and filed out, and when the last one had paid his call on Judge Duffy—any summary court is so called in the Army—the sergeant's name was called and he went in.

"Sergeant Nelson Colburn, Troop A, 18th United States Cavalry, you are charged with violation of the 61st article of war, in that you did neglect your proper duty while commander of the guard, on or about July 23, 1918, this at Camp Genicart, France. Guilty or not guilty?"

"Guilty, sir."

"By ——," snorted the major. "If this charge sheet was properly made out it would be a general court martial affair. You ought to be shot! Suppose that jerry had escaped?"

"He wouldn't escape, sir," said Colburn. "He told me we feed him better than he ever got in his life."

"Well, that's beside the point. The fact remains that you allowed a prisoner of war to be absent from the camp and beyond our control for an unknown length of time, and that is a very serious offense. The French are wild. It makes no difference if he did come back; he was gone, and we don't know where, for a whole afternoon.

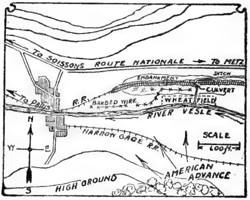
"Your troop-commander is away, so that I couldn't consult with him, but it was my intention to overlook a good deal and give you a mild sentence on the strength of your record. I had in mind to confine you to camp for a month. But I've changed my mind. I heard you utter sentiments just now that are traitorous, that a yellow cur wouldn't own to. You're a disgrace to the regiment, a dishonor to the uniform. I still think you ought to have a general court, and if it wasn't for the good name of the regiment I'd see you got one. You're guilty as ——! I'll fix you! Get out!"

The sergeant took his departure. He was received by Sergeant Olsen, the latter at the point of tears.

"They'll hang you sure," said Olsen. "Whatever made you do it?"

"Come on over to quarters, Oley," said Colburn. "I won't let you suffer. Come on over and I'll spill it. Don't make any more motions about my getting away, because I don't want to make any getaway, and some one might hear you. There's no use in losing your stripes."

They proceeded in silence through the camp, where cooks, police, troop clerks and hangers about who were not at drill regarded them with horror. They passed two German prisoners, one carrying a pick and shovel and the other pushing a wheelbarrow, herded along by a very diminutive French soldier. One of these prisoners grinned at Colburn, and the sergeant dropped his eyelid in reply.



"Is that the bird?" asked Olsen.

"That's him."

"Who put him the mouse on his eye?"

"I don't know," said Colburn. "Things were hectic, I ain't kiddin' yuh; and if that's all he got out of a bottle barrage, he's lucky."

The two went into the barrack where the sergeants were quartered. The place was deserted, all the occupants being at drill or off about their business somewhere, and the prisoner and his guard had the place all to themselves.

"Now," began Olsen, sitting down on a bunk, "spill it. Let's hear all about it. There's more cook-house rumors afloat than I ever heard in my life, but let's get the low-down. Was you drunk or did the sun get to yuh?"

"To begin at the beginning," said Colburn, unhooking his blouse and hunting for cigaret material, "it was a Saturday morning. I'd been reading the newspapers and everything, and all they say is that the Americans won a great victory at Château-Thierry, then that the frogs have taken Soissons, and that the Boche are in full retreat. It looks as if the war might be over any day.

"Well, now, I felt pretty sad. There was all that fightin' goin' on and me here ridin' herd on draftees just landed and goin' on guard every four nights, and tryin' to make France a desert by drinkin' up all the liquor in it. So feeling sad, I wanted comfort.

"Well, along about then comes the little frog with the jerry latrine squad and I had a bright thought that I'd take one of 'em over and straighten out my stuff for inspection, which would save me a lot of work. So I wandered over here with this squarehead. Well, I started to show him what I wanted done, you know, and makin' signs like a chink tellin' you how much the laundry was, and this bird sounds off in English. Not awful good, but still you knew what he was talkin' about.

" 'Make up the blankets,' says I, showin' him how, 'an' put the shoes under the bunk, and hang that towel straight, and whisk the broom a bit.' Well, he was glad enough to do that instead of what he was supposed to do. 'You fellars got good shoes,' says he, putting mine away. 'That's a nice coat,' pointing to Joe Shupps' hangin' on the wall. 'Try it on,' I says for the fun of it. So he tries it on. Then the Old Nick comes out from under the bunk and whispers in my ear.

" 'How'd yuh like to go out and have a ball of *vin rooge?*' says I.

" 'The police,' he moans, "they'd kill me!"

" 'I'll put you on a uniform,' I says, 'an' you an' me'll go for a *pasear* down to the gate an' back an' you can have a drink, and then we'll come back an' go to work.' "

"You crazy boob!" interjected Oley.

"Shut up!" directed Colburn. "No remarks. Well, the jerry climbs into Shupps' uniform and out we went. Of course, the frog had gone back to his stockade, and none of our gang knew this here jerry, so we got away strong. I expected to get burned for leaving camp while I was on guard, and that was all. I took the jerry along to get some dope from him about the war. He wasn't part of the original plan."

"What plan?" asked Olsen.

"Don't interrupt now. He wasn't part o' the plan. Well, we went out the gate and I chewed the rag with Number Four a minute and told him to keep his *ojo* peeled for the O. D. because I knew he'd be just as happy as a bug on a hot stove watchin' for the O. D. and tryin' to see him in time to give me the office, and o' course the O. D. would see him sneak off post to tell me, so I thought I was all set.

"Then we went down to that gin mill on the corner. About then the fun began. There was a bunch of frogs in there, guys on leave, I guess, all in uniform, and all drinkin' death to the Boche and readin' out loud about the big fight, and my guy's hair stands right up straight.

"Well, I got him into a chair and we had a couple of shots of wine, and I tried to get some dope out of him about how the war was fought. He ain't got no ears for me, so I decided about then that I'd better get out of there. I began to guess I had the old steer by the horns. Then over comes one o' these frogs and allows some thing about *camarade Américain*, and let's have a drink, and he pours us out some stuff he's got in a canteen.

"'Ray,' he says, 'death to the Boche,' or somethin' to that effect. Anyway, I heard the word Boche and my jerry friend let's the frog have his glass right in the mush. Then he gives a warcry in Dutch. Well, now, I've been in the Bucket o' Blood in Thompsonville when the Fourth Field was doin' M. P. duty, an' I've been in one or two barroom cleanouts in my time, but that was the liveliest.

"All I thought of was to get out and bein' near the door I did, they all goin' for the jerry anyway. He put a table under a few o' their feet and lets another guy have our bottle, that set me back three francs, right about where he tucks his dinner, and then he comes along of me. I guess the wine kinda got to him, or he was just mad as ——.

"Well, we run allee same jackrabbits, with all the bottles in that part of France buzzin' by our ears, an' we got in the gate and the guard hollers like —— and shows his rifle to the frogs an' so we got away.

"Well, who comes in the barracks but the O. D. with a moan that they're one jerry prisoner short. There's only two shovin' the cart and there ought to be three. Well, I rushes right out with the O. D. and the jerry's got sense enough to change his clothes, and he just gets 'em swapped when in comes the whole gang inspecting and catches him in the barracks.

"Well, he says I had him in to police up around my bunk and so they had me in, and about then some bright lad picks up Shupps' uniform off the floor and between one thing and another, I get my belt pulled and that's the end of it, only of course the frogs go and report that a Yank gives a cheer for the Kaiser, and the major puts two and two together, and knows —— well I was out with this squarehead and started the riot."

"Well, what the —— did you do all this foolishness for? You sound like a kid! Why, you're crazier than a locoed jughead! If you wanted to get busted, why didn't you resign?"

"I didn't want to get busted. I wanted to get promoted."

"Promoted!"

"Yeh, promoted. I aim to get a commission out of this scrap and it's time I was after it."

"Well, you would 'a' got one at Plattsburg if you hadn't gone givin' your opinion on them sheep-herdin' jaspers they called reserve officers. You wouldn't expect to get a commission after tellin' a bunch o' millionaires they wouldn't make a pimple on a good soldier's nose, would yuh?"

"That ain't here nor there. I want to get me a commission now and the first step was to get tried. I didn't aim to get jerrys and frogs lockin' horns; I just wanted to get tried and broke, and then I'd be about gettin' me a pair o' longery pins to wear on my shoulders."

At this Oley looked fixedly at his companion for a moment and then, having made up his mind, he drew his pistol, removed the magazine and threw the shells out of the chamber.

"There," said he emphatically, "you won't blow your conk off with *my* gun! I'm goin' to march you to the doc! You ain't right in your head."

The door opened with a bang.

"Sergeant Colburn," called a voice.

"Yo!" answered the sergeant. "What's on the mind?"

He beheld the person of his first sergeant advancing upon him.

"I got your sentence, you crazy loon," said the first sergeant, "you want to leave hard liquor alone when you're on guard, kid. You won't never come as near hangin' again and get away with it. The frogs been bellowin' for your life, accordin' to the sergeant major. Yuh —— fool! What the —— did yuh take that squarehead out the camp for? A man could get a stretch in Leavenworth for doin' less than that!"

"Well, what did I get? Kind of sudden with the sentence, aren't they?"

"They made it sudden especial. First off, findings guilty. Sentence, to be reduced to the grade of private, to be confined for six months, and to forfeit two-thirds of a month's pay for a like period. It's to be read at retreat tonight, but you're gettin' a special announcement.

"How does he get that way?" gasped Colburn weakly.

"—— fool!" said the first sergeant again. "Ain't you got no savvy? A man with your service, too, to go outta camp when on guard and take a prisoner of war with you, in a Yank uniform. If they could have proved it on you, you'd done a stretch, I ain't kiddin' *yuh*. If they'd found that bird in Shupps' uniform, you'd been a walkin' D target."

"——!" gasped the two sergeants.

"Wait till I read the rest of it," said the first sergeant. "If I was born with your luck I'd been John D. instead of wearin' a diamond in this dizzy troop. 'Such portion of the sentence as relates to confinement and forfeiture of pay is hereby remitted. Per order.' "

"Oh, man!" cried the two. "Oh, man!"

"——!" yelled Colburn. "I was groggy for a minute. All I could see was your old buddy making little ones outta big ones till next winter."

"Wait," said the top. " 'Special Orders, number steenth, extract! The followin' named enlisted men are hereby transferred to the Fourth Provisional Replacement Company, July Replacement Draft: Private Nelson Colburn, Troop A, 18th Cavalry. Per Order.' "

"Huh?" said Colburn. "Where's that outfit?"

"It's right here in this camp!" barked the first sergeant, "an' it leaves in about two hours for the front! Get your stuff ready and I'll take you over."

Here he sat weakly down upon a bunk, all his rage gone from him.

"Nell," said the top, "how's chances on swappin' jobs? You be the top and I'll go up to the front in your place. I'm so —— sick of soldierin' in this hole I could cry."

"Say, what do you *hombres* think I went through all this rigamarole for?" asked Colburn.

"You mean to say you went and got broke and tried and everything to get sent up to the front?" cried Olsen.

"That's whatever," agreed Colburn.

"Well, how about the commission?"

"That's all part of it."

"Well, I'm ——!" said the first sergeant. "What's the rush? There's rumors that we're going up ourselves any time."

"There's been rumors to that effect ever since we struck France four months ago, but we ain't up yet. An' I can't wait any more. I got to get going."

"Well, what did you take that jerry out with you for? You could have got broke without puttin' the rope round your neck by such a fool trick as that."

"Well, I was lonesome and sad, and so was he, and I was afraid they might just break me. So I was going to get some dope from him about the German army and go down town some night to that café where the M. P. said they had a spotter tendin' bar and get soundin' off. An M. P. told me that every once in a while some one sounded off in that place, and the next week he went sailin' up to the front."

"You —— fool," said the top again, "they don't send enlisted men up like that, only goldbrick officers that go shootin' off their face. When an enlisted man below grade seven talks too much he gets his face pushed in; he don't get sent to no front."

"Well, the jerry got snarled with the frogs and I saw I was in wrong, and I didn't know what I'd do till I thought of letting the major hear me say I didn't want to go to the front, and then he might send me there and sure enough he did. I was goin' to get broke, and then ask for a transfer."

"How come you thirst to get to the front like that?" asked Olsen.

"Well," said Colburn, "I crave excitement."

"Sergeant," said Olsen, addressing the top, "go get a doctor. This guy is off his nut complete."

"Maybe he is," said the top, "but the orders says to get him to the Fourth Provisional Company, and the major told me if he got away from me not to never show up here again; so gather up your clothes, private, and we'll be goin'."

TWO days later the Fourth Provisional Replacement Company descended from its box cars at Château-Thierry. They did not need to ask if they were at the front. The railroad station was a wreck, a near-by repair shop was a pile of brick and rusty iron, and the telegraph wires still hung in great festoons from every pole, like spaghetti from a fork. They lined the company up, counted noses and ushered them into some trucks.

"Do you know what outfit we're going to?" ex-Sergeant Colburn asked one of his companions, as they clanged over the bumpy street.

"I don't know," said the other, 'n I don't give a ——. They're all the same. I been hounded up an' down from this to that and back again for eight months now, an' they're all the same. One hog-wrastle after another. I'm glad I'm gettin' to the front at last. I waited long enough. What's that sign mean?"

The sign was a great black plank, with the word in white on it—

UNTERSTANDEN.

"—— fino," said Nell, "it's a Boche sign. This must be where we chucked 'em out. I wonder how far we've gone. Say, this was quite a town to be all knocked to chewin' gum. It's a wonder they couldn't clean it up."

The truck by now had left the town and turned into a highroad running out into the country. The white dust billowed up and surrounded the men, so that conversation came to an end, on pain of smothering in the clouds. When the dust would lower for a second, glimpses could be caught of broken carriages, a ditch with German helmets scattered about in it, Yank overcoats hanging to trees, a rifle stuck into the ground by its bayonet.

The men began to show excitement. They wanted to appear calm, they wanted each other to think that the approach of battle meant nothing to them, but the strain finally became unendurable. When at last a squadron of planes appeared high overhead in the cloudless sky, and black flowers began to bloom beneath them, the men could restrain themselves no longer.

"Yay!" they cheered. "Bring 'em down, kid, hit 'em in the eye! Pepper 'em, —— 'em, shoot 'em all down!"

"Look at 'em, they don't mind them shells a mite! Ain't them gunners got no eyes at all?"

"They don't seem to hit within a mile of 'em, do they?"

"Shut up the bellerin'," called the driver of the truck over his shoulder. "Them is our planes, and the jerries are tryin' to down 'em."

"That so?" said the men in the truck. "Well, we might a known that our gunners wouldn't be so far off the target."

"You tell 'em," said the truck driver. "If you want to see some fine shootin' all over the lot, you want to watch some o' them cosmoline anti-aircraft outfits. There's only one thing worse, an' that's the field artillery in this man's Army. Half the time they're shellin' their own roads. Well, I ain't no man to discourage yuh."

The driver slowed to a stop as an officer came out to the road and held up his hand.

"Are those replacements for the Thirty-first?" called the officer.

"Yessir."

"Well, you might as well drop them here, it will save them quite a walk back. How many in there?"

It appeared that there were twenty. The Fourth Company had been composed of a hundred and forty men, which would furnish the replacements for a battalion. The truck that held Nell Colburn was emptied, and another like it, and the officer, after conferring with one of the company officers, who had been on the second truck, formed the men up and marched them into the woods. Here they were divided and Nell's truckload, with some twenty others, taken to a great block of a building on the edge of the forest.

"This here is G Company," said the man who had brought them over. "The top will be out in a minute."

A guide led Colburn around the corner of the building to a small room that had the appearance of having been a cow shed at some time or other.

"Hey, corporal!" called the guide, "here's a friend for yuh."

A red-haired man in his undershirt appeared and Colburn was pointed out to him. Then the guide passed on with his other charges.

"My name's Mead," said the corporal, looking keenly at Nell. "You ever soldiered before?"

"Well," began Nell, but the corporal interrupted.

His eye had noted the neatly fitting blouse, the old Army breeches and the scar of the chevrons on the sleeve.

"Never mind," he said quickly. "I don't care, 'tain't nothin' to me. C'm in and I'll see about a bunk."

Within the shed were six men, one of whom wrote a letter, another wrapped and unwrapped a new pair of puttees in an effort to make them look somewhat presentable, a third placidly cleaned his rifle and the other two were engaged in a game of pinochle.

"You can sling your pack down in the hay anywheres," said the corporal. "You won't need to make up a bunk because we're movin' outta here at dark. It's about time or the coots would eat us alive. The place is lousy with 'em."

The men, after one look at Nell, went on with their occupations. They were very silent, probably because of the newcomer, and also because of the heat. They all had glaringly new underwear on, most of them had new breeches and some had new shoes.

"Didn't they give you a new rifle?" a man asked suddenly, pointing to the Enfield that Nell had stood against the wall.

"Nope," said Nell, "that's the only one I've got. I see you fellers got the old Springfield. Maybe I can buscar one."

"They'll issue you one out, maybe," said the corporal. "You wouldn't want to lug that one very far."

"It'll do to kill one or two squareheads with," said Nell, smiling.

"Huh!" cried two or three at once. "You won't kill no squareheads for some time!"

"How come?" gasped the ex-cavalryman. "Isn't this the front?"

"Sure it's the front, but we ain't on it," said the corporal. "We come outta the lines three days ago and we're startin' for rest billets tonight. We won't do no more fightin' this summer."

Nell said never a word. He sat on the floor, his back against a stall, and looked at a German ammunition pouch that had been souvenired by one of the men. It was made of leather, with three oblong pockets, and had wire hooks to hang to the knapsack straps. Nell would never get one. No more fighting this summer!

"Would they mind a guy taking a little *pasear* around here?" asked Nell.

"Nope," said the corporal. "There's a Boche trench over there on the edge of the woods you might like to look at."

NELL went out. The sun was terrific and the fields were dry and burned. The wheat had been cut by the Germans and either shipped to their field bakeries or home to Germany. There was no clamor of battle, no sign of war, nothing but the peaceful aspect of a country landscape, distant hills half seen through the haze, and the snaky road with trucks thundering by from time to time. At intervals a lonely plane buzzed overhead.

"Don't it beat ——," muttered Colburn. "Here I go and get broke to get up to the front and then don't get there. I've known some —— fools in my time, but none as big as me. A buck private in a doughboy outfit, the Thirty-first. That's a new one on me. Must be one o' these home-made regiments, like the Three Hundred and First Cavalry or the Fifty-second Artillery. Bunch of lunatics. Cooks police to do an' I haven't had my hands in a pan for three years. Bet they give me recruit drill. Huh! This is a —— of a war! No wonder it lasted four years if this is a sample."

He inspected the old German trench, which was nothing but a shallow ditch, with a few reels of machine-gun ammunition lying around and a piece of a rifle. About the farm, and here and there in the woods he could see men moving, hanging clothes to dry, cleaning rifles or killing time. And meanwhile the war was raging and no chance of getting to it, any more than if he, ex-Sergeant Colburn, were still doing patrol duty at Ruidosa or Marfa, or any other remote border post.

"——'s bells and the —— to ring 'em," groaned Nell. "The Army in war time is no place for a guy that's got any ambition. I got just about as much chance of gettin' a commission as a louse has of bein' made commander-in-chief of the armies."

Somewhere in the woods a bugle blew first call for something, and whatever it was it behooved Nell to be gone to his squad, which he did, and made himself ready to stand a formation. He fell in with his squad and before assembly blew, took a good look at them.

The formation was evidently retreat, there was much calling of the roll and checking of numbers and inspection of equipment, which took some time. The company commander, a tall nervous man, walked up and down, exhorting.

"Every man got a new gas-mask canister?" he cried. "If I find a man without one, I'll skin him alive! Be sure all your men have a full allowance of ammunition, Corporals. Fill canteens with water only. Let me catch you with wine in them. You'll never be able to drink a drop of it again with comfort."

At this formation Nell's Enfield or Model 1917 rifle was taken away and he was given a Model 1903, known as the Springfield. This was the rifle with which his regiment had been armed and with which he was familiar. This rifle was also lighter than the later model, a thing that he was very thankful for. Abruptly they were dismissed and each man, without waiting for the call, got his mess kit and lined up by the shed where the rolling kitchen was. Then when mess call blew, they were all ready to eat.

Colburn ate with his squad. They all sat together against the house wall, and he thought this would be a good chance to get acquainted with them. As he sat down very gingerly, skilfully balancing his mess kit so that the slum would neither run out of the meat can, nor the apricots off the cover, nor the handle of his cup come undone and his coffee all go ——ward, one of the men was speaking his mind.

"It don't look right," said the man, "for us to have all this chow tonight. Slum, an' a guy could shut his eyes and make a stab at it an' hit a potato or a piece o' meat every time, apricots fer dessert, coffee with canned cream to go in it, and all the bread you want, take two. I maintain they're goin' to march us off our feet. They may take us clear across France, who knows?"

"Ferget it," said a dark swarthy man, a little inclined to stoutness. "You're off your head. They got all this chow on hand and want to get rid of it."

"You got the idear, 'Spagett,'" said the corporal, with his mouth full.

"That so?" objected the first man. "Well, if that's so, then how come all this moan about havin' lots of ammunition? 'Every man have his belt full,' says the skipper. What for? I spose we're goin' to shoot snipe or somethin'?"

" 'Bottle,' you ain't got half the brains —— give a mule skinner. How we gonna carry our ammunition? If the guys don't lug it in their belts, it's got to go on wagons, and we ain't got too many wagons."

"Well, I wish t' —— we wasn't hikin' tonight," interjected another member o' the squad. "I believe I'm comin' down with my boils again. I got a regular peony right where it'll do the most harm. I'll have a interestin' march, kid. Me for the ammunition cart the minute it gets dark."

"You lemme catch you," said the corporal darkly.

"Don't worry," responded the other, "you won't."

Then Bottle, who must be so called because his name as shouted at retreat was Bartle, looked at Colburn.

"I bet you're glad we're goin' away from the front tonight anyway, even if we are hikin' it."

"Well, I'm not," said Nell, "not by a —— sight. I came up to see some horn tanglin' with the Boche and I'd just as soon see a little before I go away. This war's liable to be over any day."

After that there was a long moment of silence. Then the corporal, in view of his rank, spoke.

"Man," said he, "you won't never regret goin' away from the front. We been in there monkeyin' with them krauts for about a week and we're fed up aplenty. You needn't worry about the war bein' over. It'll run for some time yet. An' a little of this fightin' stuff does a man a long, long time, especially if he's a mud thumper. There's guys right in this squad—" here he looked hard at Bottle—"that if you was to yell 'Boche' at 'em good and loud right now, they'd jump clean out from under their wig."

"It ain't so!" said Bottle, his face a deep red. "I ain't no more afraid of 'em than any one else.

"They're kiddin' me," said Bottle, turning to Nell, "because when we was going through some woods some o' the guys snarls up with a machine-gun and while they was all yellin' an' givin' advice I stepped on a hornet's nest. What the —— do they think, I'd stand there an' get stung to death?"

"I hollered 'Boche,' grinned the man called Spagett, "an' Bottle give a jump that took him clear out of the advance zone."

"I didn't run far," said Bottle. "I just run an' jumped in that creek. Any o' you guys would have if you'd stepped on that bees' nest."

The men finished the meal hurriedly, for a few drops of rain had pattered down, and then hurried to the cow shed.

"I don't think we'll start till dark," said the corporal, "an' it may let up before then."

The men sat in the hot interior of the shed, steaming, while the rain poured down outside. It came in sheets and the darkness with it.

" 'Nother wet march," growled the men. "Our nice new clothes, too. When those trucks get through splashin' mud on us we'll look wors'n we did before."

"There's the whistle," cried the corporal suddenly. "Outside every one. Be sure you got your breech covers on good an' tight."

THE march began in a hazy twilight. It was Colburn's first march on foot with a pack and after the first hundred yards he was sure he was not going to like it. In his pack were two blankets, emergency rations that had been issued at retreat, his mess-kit and toilet articles, a shelter half, poles and pins and an extra pair of shoes.

He got rid of the shoes first, since they were on the outside and could be more easily discarded.

The company followed the road for some distance and joined up with the other companies of the battalion. Then the column came out on a main road, for Nell could hear trucks rattling and the creak of axles mingling with the stamping of hoofs. A loud cry was heard at the head of the column and as it was passed back, Nell could distinguish what it was.

"Take hold of the man in front!"

Nell reached out his hand and got hold of the straps of a man's pack. At the same time a groping claw came over his shoulder and took him by the face.

"Leggo!" cried Nell.

"My mistake," said the other man. "Who's that?"

"Colburn."

"I'm Goodrich," said the other man. "My boil is near killin' me. Man, ain't it black!"

The column toiled along, stopping, starting and stopping again. At times there were loud rumbles and terrific crashes.

Nell thought this was gunfire, but the noise usually followed a lightning flash, so that he decided that it was thunder.

The lightning would show the dripping column on one side of the road and on the other a line of trucks, moving steadily along, seemingly endless.

The rain came down in torrents. It was like standing under a waterfall. The water ran down the men's faces and so under the collars of the slickers. It ran in between the hooks in front, it dripped from the bottom, and soaked down inside the puttee. Their shoes were full of water, not from the outside, but from this internal seepage.

Nell, feeling a mysterious bulge, discovered that his slicker pocket was full of water. This he emptied, and swore feelingly. Once the man ahead of him broke away from his hold and Nell had to grope wildly for a half minute or so, with all the helplessness and panic of a drowning man, before he could find him. Then it was only because a lightning flash showed him his man, about a yard ahead.

"Come on," cried Nell, "leggo my belt, you —— fool. How can I catch up with my man if you hang on to me like that?"

"There's fifty guys got hold of me," protested Goodrich.

"Well, tell 'em to take up the trot!"

This was passed back and the men moving out faster, Goodrich moaning because of his boil, Nell finally found a pack within the grasp of his hand once more. At the same time he received a sharp blow upon that portion of him where a kick would be most apt to land.

"Hey!" he cried. "Who the —— kicked me? Any of you birds want an argument? I won't stand for any rough stuff, and you might as well find it out now as later. I can knock any man for a gool that kicks me!"

He turned sharply around, still keeping hold of the pack in front, and as he did so, Goodrich cried out.

"Ow! Leggo that rifle! Gimme that rifle, you ——! Where the —— do you think you're goin'?"

"Fresh truck drivers!" cried several voices at once, and howls from the line of trucks showed that missiles were being hurled by the infantry.

There was a glitter of lightning and Nell saw what had hit him. There was an ammunition cart drawn by a limber just beside him. Some part of the limber had struck him in passing. Now the cart had a brake, a long thing that stuck up in the air like a lance and was worked from the limber by a rope. This brake arm had caught Goodrich's slung rifle and was very nearly tearing it off his shoulder. The flash went out and a chorus of jeers and cries went up from the column.

"Where's he goin' with that thing?" cried Nell, but his words were lost in a sharp clap of thunder.

On the heels of the clap came such a cry as men hear in their dreams, but rarely during waking moments. Another clap, nearer and sharper—*BLAM!* Another shout, more like a shriek. The column halted in consternation. Lightning again, the sky as bright as day, but there was a great blot of shadow on the column, on the man in front of Nell, on the trucks, and the ammunition cart. Darkness again, a roar of sound, and a great red light.

"Hey! Hey! A plane! A bombin' plane!"

"Lay off those bombs; we're Yanks!"

"Git off the road!"

"Under cover!"

"Stay on the road, it's one of our planes!"

"Boche plane! Boche plane!"

There was another bomb and another wild cry to the man overhead that the soldiers on the road were Yanks. There was a sound as of a rushing torrent, the rustling of hundreds of slickers, the sucking of hundreds of feet in the muddy ditch. The battalion had taken to the fields.

In the first second of horror and confusion, Colburn went with them, but as he jumped across the ditch the thought occurred to him that if this was a panic he might obtain some measure of gratitude from his new officers by helping to stop it. However, the officers and non-coms had no idea of letting the men get out of hand.

"Steady, G Company," he could hear them call, and as the men halted, he heard his own corporal commanding:

"Fourth squad, stick around! Spread out, but don't run no more! Fourth squad all right, any one hit? Sound off your names!"

THE men began to call out their names, answering from here and there in the darkness. They were all present. The same thing was going on all around them, corporals assembling squads, and sergeants helping lieutenants to re-form shattered platoons.

In a little while the men stopped calling and now another sound, that had been unheard before, began to make itself audible. There was a tremendous mess on the road. There were dead and wounded horses, dead and wounded men, trucks with their motors still running and the hind end of them in kindling wood.

"——!" muttered Nell, "can't we do something for those guys out there?"

"The stretcher bearers'll look after 'em," said some one. "They'll all be took care of."

"It's kinda tough on 'em, aint it," spoke another man, "to be knocked off just when we was goin' out to rest billets? If we was goin' up to the front now, it would be a blessin' to get a little skin knocked off and get sent out right at the start."

There was a command from the head of the column.

"Forward!"

A mad scrambling ensued as every one reached out to take hold of his neighbor. Squads and platoons were intermixed, men seized each other and as they started to move out many found they were going in circles.

"Hey!" cried several. "We aint gettin' anywheres! Whose the head o' this line? Which way do we go?"

A sharp voice rose above all the others, not loud or bellowing, but crackling like a whip, a voice whose sound was distinguishable above the clamor in much the same fashion that a one-pounder gun can be clearly heard above all the racket of a battle.

"Straighten out here, men! —— my soul, we're not playing ring around a rosie! You're worse than the militia! First squad, where are you? Good, move out. Second squad, second squad, where the ——'s the second squad? Second squad! Is that the second squad? What are you doing over there? Lying down? Who told you to lie down? Corporal, you're a private, compree that? You're a private! Mulkern, you take charge of the squad. Remember sergeant, Mulkern's a corporal if I'm a casualty. Move out now. Third squad all right? Fourth squad. Come, come, let's get going; we can't stay here all night."

As they hurried along the edge of the field, Nell felt a surge of fear. The men were being hurried as fast as possible from the scene of the bombing, for there is nothing that will wreck the morale of even veteran troops so quickly as a black night and the presence of a great number of wounded calling for first aid.

It was strange, though, that the men about Nell should have been affected so suddenly. A few minutes before they had been fairly calm, a little breathless, a little jumpy till they found who had been hit, but not more than mildly excited. On the tick of a second it had all changed. Breath whistled through teeth, men panted and coughed, and all hurried, hurried, crowding and shoving, and the atmosphere was charged with terror.

"What the —— struck all this gang so quick?" asked Nell over his shoulder.

He was not answered, but from the darkness beside him came excited whispers.

"'Juh hear what the old man said? 'If I'm a casualty,' he says. We're goin' back to the front!"

"Shut up, you!" ordered the corporal. "You got another one o' your coke jags. Why mightn't the old man be a casualty? Think that's the only Boche plane that's out tonight?"

"That was one o' our planes."

"Wasn't no such a thing! Our planes got a light on 'em. That's a Boche. An' he never knew what luck he had, I betcha. How could he tell there was a road there and it rainin' soup and stones to splash it? He was huntin' for a dump or a hospital or somethin' in them woods, an' let them bombs go for luck."

There was a thud from in front and a smothered curse. On the heels of it a clatter and another thud.

"For ——'s sake, pick up your feet," pleaded some one. "You shoved that —— rifle halfway through me."

"There's a ditch here," called some one, "look out for it!"

"We must be gettin' back to the road," observed the corporal. "We'll soon enough see if we're goin' back to the front. Fat chance. We done all our front stuff last week."

The column was back on the road, they could tell that by the feel of the ground under their feet, and by the roar of the motors. There were not so many here, they were lighter cars, by the sound, probably ambulances.

"If we could see some trucks," observed an invisible speaker, "we could tell which way they was goin' and then we'd know where we was at in this —— hole."

"Can't you tell by the ambulances?" asked Nell.

"Naw. They might be goin' up empty. They run both ways. But trucks usually only run one way this time o' night, and that's up to the front. If I'd only had sense I'd have looked when they was splatterin' mud on us, but I was too busy hanging on to the guy ahead."

After a while there was a halt. The halt was signalled by each man running his nose against the rifle or pack of the man in front, at the same time doing his best to climb up the back of his legs. The men stated their feelings with some energy of expression, but finding after a minute or so that his was a real halt, and not just a check in the march to allow traffic to clear up, sat down in the mud and listened to the rain pattering on their steel helmets.

"I begin to think I could sleep," said Nell to the man next him. "I spent the last two nights in a box car with about forty other birds and the sleeping quarters were poor. What do they do to you if you ease off your pack and forget to put it on again?"

"I wouldn't," said the other man, whose voice showed him to be Spagett. "We all got new stuff issued us an' when we get back to billets they'll have a showdown, an' any one that's shy, finds it on the payroll."

Nell sighed. The pack was intolerably heavy. It bumped the back of his legs when he walked and the straps were cutting his arms off. In addition, he had a belt full of ammunition, an item that was not the lightest of all he had on him. He wondered how Goodrich's boil was. Off in the woods there was a short, sharp sound, a kind of crack, like a bat meeting a ball for a home run. The resting column woke to instant comment.

" 'S a G. I. can!"

"Ain't either. We're outta range!"

"Was that a shell? By ——, it sounded like one!"

The sound occurred again, prefaced by a short whistle.

"Boy," said Spagett, "they done us dirt! Those are shells as sure as I'm sittin' in this mud! Rest billets, ——! We're goin' up again."

"Do you really think so?" cried Nell. "Honest to —— now!"

"Huh!" grunted Spagett. "I seen enough of 'em. You won't be so crazy about goin' to the front this time tomorrow night, that is, if you ain't pushin' up daisies by then."

THE column moved forward a few yards and halted again, perhaps to get away from the shells. There was bitter discussion on all sides.

The noise was a shell bursting. The noise was no such thing, but men unloading lumber for barracks.

The column was already under fire, and there had been casualties at the head of it.

The column was out of range, for they had just passed a cross roads where they had lost the road coming up ten days before.

The officers were lost and were going back to the front instead of away from it.

Another short forward stretch and another halt. This was prolonged and Nell tried to lie down and get a bit of sleep, first cautioning Spagett to awaken him when the column went forward again. This Spagett agreed to do, provided he was awake himself.

The next thing Nell heard was the clang of a bell and a wild cry. He sat up at once, knowing from the stiffness of his limbs that he had been asleep.

" 'S that?" cried the men. "That a gas alarm?"

"Gas alert!" was passed sternly up and down the column, and the men who had been carrying their masks under their arms put them at the alert position, that is, strapped to their chests, and waited with beating hearts for another alarm, or the smell of gas in the air.

"Curran," said the corporal sternly. "Was that you made that noise?"

"It fell outta my pack," said Curran plaintively.

"All right. A week in the kitchen for you when we get to billets. I told you to leave that —— thing behind."

"What's this?" asked Nell.

"Aw, this dizzy Curran's got one o' those vases they make outa a 75 shell. The order is out that we ain't to do it no more and that all that kinda stuff is to be turned in, but Curran's hangin' on to that vase like grim death. He says he's goin' to send it home to his girl. Hey, here comes some troops!"

There was the sound of a column

marching down the other side of the road. *Slop, slop, slop,* went their feet, their slickers rustled and their equipment rattled. They were moving in a direction opposite to that in which the column was headed.

"What outfit?" called some one.

"Ninety-fourth," was the reply.

"*What!*"

If there were any sleepers in the column they awoke now to instant wakefulness at that cry of rage and chagrin.

"You the Ninety-fourth, the guys that relieved us?"

"Yup," said the marching men.

"They lost the line," called a voice down the column. "They couldn't hold it an' we got to go take it back again!"

"Oh, the dirty unspeakables!" howled the men in the ditch. "Oh, the —— milishy! An' we lost our rest an' everything."

The growl increased. Opprobrium was heaped on the marchers. Hoots and catcalls resounded. The marchers were too tired to pay any heed, but suddenly some one, who, from the way he talked, was an officer, began to shout.

"Listen here, you men! Don't talk that way to us! We volunteered to take over your sector for you so that you could get some rest and we've had a —— of a time up there while you were rolling on your backs! And this is all we get for it! There's gratitude for you! You're a bunch of skunks, every —— one of you. I can lick any six of you that have got the guts to come out here and fight! You aren't fit to dig latrines for the quartermaster corps!"

"Who's there," called some one from the ditch. "Draw it mild, draw it mild! You're tired and all that, but don't blackguard this outfit or I'll hang a lily on your nose myself!"

"That's our old man," cried Spagett delightedly. "He'd do it, too."

"Raaazzberry!" cheered the men in the ditch, secure in the hiding darkness.

Just as this interesting point, there was a stir of men getting to their feet, and the march began again.

"Any doubt about our going to the front now?" asked Nell.

"Not for sour-apple juice," answered several at once.

"Not so bad," thought Nell, "not so bad. Things may come our way yet."

Then he walked on with better spirits. They turned off the road in a little while and, falling and stumbling, went some distance into black woods.

"This is us," said Spagett, "and we ain't very near because I don't hear no shells."

"If you can find a hole," said the corporal, "get in it. If you can't, dig yourself one. No one sleeps on top the ground, now mind."

Nell could hear muttering, the clink of pick and shovel, and the thump of packs being hurled to the ground. He began to undo his own, as some one took him by the arm.

"That you, Colburn? This is Corporal Meade. Hunt around an' you'll find a hole. There ought to be all kinds of 'em here. Golly! There's one, I like to broke my neck falling in to it. Well, that fixes you. Goodrich, where you at? Got a hole?"

The rest of it Nell did not hear. He had lain down in the hole and in spite of the two or three inches of water in the bottom was instantly asleep.

Nell slowly began to realize that there was an intermittent pain in his leg, that shifted suddenly to the upper part of his body. As the pain increased his mind became clearer, and he discovered that a man was prodding him with something. He opened his eyes to see a soldier standing on the edge of the hole, a dim shape against the mist of early day, lifting his rifle and letting it fall, with the motion of one churning cream in an old fashioned churn, Nell taking the part of the cream and the rifle the dasher.

"Lay off!" cried Nell. "What the —— do you think I'm made of?"

"Gup!" said the man.

Then sighing, he moved over to another hole and Nell could see him prodding away with a will. A strangled shriek came from that hole, a cry that made every scalp within yards draw tight and prickle. The hole erupted a man with a slicker flying, who made for the prodder, but the latter fled, and the man who had shrieked did not follow, but limped about moaning and uttering burning words. Nell recognized Goodrich.

"My boil!" cried the poor man in answer to some one's question. "He poked his —— rifle right into it! I thought he'd run his bayonet through me!"

It was quite light now, though the mist was heavy, and Nell could see something of the nature of the ground. They were in a thin wood, a sort of park, with considerable space between the trees and with no brush. There was much litter on the ground, belts, packs, rifles, Chaucat ammunition carriers, bandages from first aid packets—there are two in a packet and when one is used there is nothing to do with the other but throw it away — tin cans that had contained hardtack, and innumerable slickers.

The rest of the battalion were invisible, but in that particular part of the woods Nell could see his own squad, sleepily rubbing their eyes, and enough other men to let him know that a platoon was being organized.

The platoon commander was a young man, much younger even than Nell, but the sergeant who was assisting him was an old timer wifh grizzled hair. They were hurrying about inspecting ammunition belts, putting a Chaucat gunner in a different place, finding a bayonet on the ground for a man who had lost his, handing out fistfuls of rifle ammunition to men who stuffed their pockets with the clips, and keeping up a running fire of comment and advice the while. The officer suddenly espied Nell and came over to him.

"Aren't you one of the replacements?" he asked.

"Yessir," said Nell.

"Do you know how to work your rifle?"

"Yessir."

"Let me see you load it."

Nell did so and the officer, satisfied, gave a grunt.

"You'd be surprized how many times we get men that don't know how to load their rifle," he went on. "And that's not only bad for them, but for all of us. You'd think they'd have more sense in the replacement camps. There, the sergeant's found a novice!"

THE officer hurried away to where the sergeant was giving a short dissertation on the rifle to one of the men who had come up with Nell the day before. Whether the man was getting what was told him did not appear, but the sergeant left him and hurried to another.

The reason for such a sad state of affairs was that this division was armed with the model 1903 rifle, and the replacements were invariably trained with the model 1917, which, while not very greatly different, is exceedingly so to one not familiar with firearms.

"Ain't that ——," commented Curran.

Nell knew it was he, for he had his brass vase under his arm.

"Now these poor goops that joined yesterday don't know what they're doin' here, they don't know what their bayonet is for, an' the best they can hope for is to stop a bullet in some place where it won't do much harm."

"Well, if they stop one that might hit a better man they done their duty," said Spagett.

"Yeh," agreed Curran, "but most usually the bullet goes right through 'em and hits the better man just the same."

"Well, you stay in front o' me then, it won't go through both of you."

"You first, Alphonse," said Curran. "I got a vase I don't want spoiled by no demon machine-gunner."

There was a sharp blast of the whistle and the men began to move off, each squad in single file, threading among the trees.

"Where are we going now?" asked Nell.

"Gonna eat," said a man who was another member of the squad that Nell had not heard speak before.

The squad laughed heartily and got a reproving look from the officer, who was some distance away, and a growl from the sergeant, who was following along behind. After that they moved in silence, stepping carefully, avoiding thickets, holding their breath, and waiting, waiting, like hunters nearing the game.

The men all had their rifles slung, this Nell noticed, but he also noticed the Chaucat gunner. He had his rifle slung, but its muzzle pointed to the front and the but was against his hip.

Nell felt a slight increase in the number of his heart beats. These men were going into action and he was going with them. He would like to dump his pack, but the sergeant was behind and would probably make him take it up again.

Rap-rap-rap-rap-rap-RAP-RAP-RAP RAP! Every man went down.

"Off packs!" cried the corporal. "The looey forgot it or he don't give a ——, but take 'em off now!"

Nell undid the hooks of his pack carrier and thrusting his finger through the loop of the strap that held his blanket roll to the rest of his pack, pulled it out, and his blanket roll and shelter half came away.

There was another rapping that swelled

as it continued into a steady roar, then stopped. There was a crying in the mist, like hurt children.

"It ain't us," muttered Spagett, "it's over on the left. When they shoot at us you can hear the bullets tickin' on the trees and the none of our guys ain't hollered for first aid."

Blam! Bablablam!

"There goes the grenades," called the corporal over his shoulder. "Ready now!"

There was a short blast of the whistle and the men got to their feet. Most of them were hooking their suspender straps into their belts again, and some had thrown away pack, blankets and all. Such a one was Goodrich, and the corporal took him severely to task.

"You'll be —— good and hungry tonight with no rations," said he, "and bellyachin' because the guys that lugged their packs all day won't give you none o' theirs."

"I ain't got no appetite," said Goodrich, "my boil keeps me too amused. I ain't got no mind for nothin' but *it*. Anyways there'll be plenty to eat for them that can eat it by night—huh? Whathe ——!"

"Here!" shouted the officer. "Don't shoot! Don't a man fire! They didn't fire at us! Here, —— you, let them alone!"

He ran forward and Nell's astonished eye saw him seize a man by the scruff of the neck and haul him back bodily. Then, as people sometimes blink their eyes to make sure the vision, Nell rubbed his eyes to be sure he really saw what he thought he did.

Yes, the vision still persisted. There was a group of men, clad in gray uniforms that made them hard to see in the fog, standing with their hands in the air. There seemed to be a lot of them, but Nell could not count how many. He tried several times, but each time lost track. There were almost a dozen anyway.

They stood, grinning foolishly, not sure that they would not be butchered out of hand. The men seemed half inclined to put them to the bayonet, but the officer had said, "No!" and after all, these jerries had surrendered without firing, so that it was hardly fair to kill them.

As he went by, Nell saw the pit and the reels of ammunition, and the tripod. The gun was lying in the bottom of the pit, not even mounted, so that it would be plain to the advancing Americans that this particular gun crew meant them no harm.

"They're licked," said Curran. "We won't have no trouble with 'em now."

"This ain't no kind of a fight, anyway," remarked Spagett. "Where's our barrage?"

"Off in the woods about a mile, like it always is," said Curran. "They can't make me mad. The farther away it is, the less chance o' them dizzy artillerymen droppin' it on us."

A machine-gun buzzed under their feet like a rattler. They dived to earth and Nell thought every one must be hit. The gun chattered steadily, then stopped, spat again, then silence. The gunners were waiting for the men to start forward again. Nell flattened himself. He was not afraid, but quite excited, and eager to see more of this affair, hence he hated to think he might be hit at this early stage.

Now what? The men lay face down. He could see a pair of hob-nailed soles that belonged to Spagett, and the hills and valleys of a form that must be Goodrich, although his face was hidden behind a bush. None of them moved a muscle.

At intervals the gun scolded. Nell finally began to think he could tell where it was. It was off to the right, about opposite the first squad, perhaps. Just as he came to this conclusion, he felt a hand on his ankle.

"Fourth squad, on your way," said the sergeant's voice. "Take 'em along, Meade. It is over to the right a little ways."

Nell felt a thrill such as he remembered when he was a recruit and was getting his first instruction in jumping a horse. "You next," the corporal had said, and away the horse had taken Nell, to what he did not know, except that he knew it was going to be very unpleasant, not to say disagreeable.

So the squad went forward and Nell with them. He saw Spagett making ready a round ball-like thing that he knew very well was a grenade. On the other side of him crawled Curran, his brass vase strapped where his blankets had been, in the same manner that a mountain-gun is strapped to the jug-head that carries it.

These two, thought Nell, were always near him, these two and Goodrich. By accident or design? Undoubtedly design. They had surrounded him with old, tried campaigners, as a green colt is put in a set of fours with three veteran troop horses, in order that he may take pattern by their calm and steady bearing whenever something new and strange startles him, which, without their quieting presence, might drive him into a frenzy of fright.

And he, a sergeant of cavalry, did not even know how to handle a grenade, and was not to be trusted with one, lest he do injury to his comrades.

Then he saw the gun.

THE Boche were just ahead of them in a shallow trench. The gun was on the parapet and the men that were serving it were lying listening. The gun was aimed directly at them. He could even look down the muzzle.

The gun was huge and round, a large cylinder, with a tiny horn projecting from the muzzle, and a plug, with a little chain hanging from it. The gunner sat on the tripod, his body invisible, but his boots and gray clad legs stuck around the side. There was a hole in one of his trouser knees.

Beside the gun a man knelt, looking into the fog with an anxious expression. There was another man on the opposite side of the gun, just his head visible, his nose in the air like a dog's, smelling the wind. The gunners knew that attempts were being made to surround them, and they hesitated to fire lest they shoot in the wrong direction, and thus disclose their position.

Nell held his breath until his ears roared. It seemed that those Germans must be able to see him, why, he could see their buttons, even, and the breast of the man's coat rising and falling as he breathed. Suddenly the kneeling man pointed, his arm darting out like a striking snake.

The gun swung to the left and the bullets began to climb up the belt and disappear in the breach, like a moving staircase. Spagett's arm snapped up and back, but Nell did not see the grenade go. Spagett must have only signaled, for there was no explosion. An unseen German gave a sharp cry that was drowned in a thunderclap of noise. White smoke boiled from the trench and with a shout, the squad rushed forward.

Nell, not knowing the tactics of silencing machine-guns, was not ready for the rush and so was a little slower than the rest. When he arrived at the gun there was nothing to be seen but a tangled heap of bodies, the machine-gun still pointing to the left into the woods, and little spirals of smoke curling up from the shattered ground.

"Jump in the trench," said Meade. "Keep low till the other one gets goin'!"

Some men rushed in from the woods and jumped down. They were the men of the right of the company.

"Did they get many of yuh?" asked Meade.

"Two," said the newcomers. "They seen us an' we couldn't duck."

"Well we fixed 'em," said the corporal. "Get under now, this ain't the gun we was after; there's another one round here somewheres. Lay low till it starts. Where's the rest o' the outfit?"

The men in the trench listened. They could hear men moving through the woods, the faint crash of grenades, and machine-guns firing on the left.

"It's time we was gettin' on," said the corporal of the second squad. "We don't want to get left."

"I tell you there's another gun around here," said Corporal Meade, "and I don't crave to go on and leave it."

"Well, let's buscar round a bit then."

"I know a better way," said Meade.

Here he nodded his head wisely and winked.

"Gonna turn the gun on 'em?" suggested Spagett.

"Nope, there's too many of our guys runnin' round in this fog."

"Come on," said the other corporal, "there ain't no more guns, let's get on."

"We can wait here ten minutes," said Meade, "or more, an' then catch up with the platoon. They won't go so awful fast I don't think. Well, now, let's wait here and not say a word and see what happens in five minutes. Let's you an' me skip rocks."

The men of the fourth squad grinned. This sort of thing was evidently a common enough thing to them.

They sat on the parapet or strained their eyes into the fog. The men of the other squad stayed in the trench, their rifles ready, listening. The two corporals began to throw stones ahead of them into the woods. Nell watched with intense curiosity. He knew that some deep-laid plan was afoot, but what it was he did not know.

The stones were thrown a few feet beyond the trench, then a little farther, and then still farther into the woods. It occurred to Nell that the sound of them striking the ground was similar to the little sounds men would make if they were moving very cautiously through the woods.

Tack-tack-tack! The men on the parapet threw themselves on the ground and began to wriggle in the direction of the sound.

"It's in the trench," whispered Meade.

The other corporal nodded and his men began to creep very slowly along the bottom of the trench.

Blam! A wild yell and the machine-gun barking. It fired a long time, almost a minute, then stopped. Nell heard the men about him growling in their throats. Evidently a rush had failed. Rooting out these guns was not as easy as it might appear. The fog made it difficult to tell where the gun was by the sound of it, and it was very possible that it was not in the trench, but in front or in back of it.

Meade cast a handful of stones into the woods and was rewarded by another burst of fire from the gun. He held up his hand for attention and then pointed over the trench wall. The men went up, one by one, and Nell wondered why it should be so cold on top of the ground when it had been quite comfortable in the trench.

The men he was with were on the back of the trench, and Spagett and Goodrich, with one or two others, had crawled along the opposite side or front. The corporal threw some more stones and again the gun responded, this time with terrific noise. It must be under their very noses. Nell could not see it, but the corporal must have been able to, for he took a grenade from his pocket and held it up so that all might see.

The others each took a grenade and as the corporal hurled his, followed his example. Nell gathered his legs under him for the rush. This time he was going to be there as soon as any of them. The grenades exploded with glorious roar, much too close for comfort, for when Nell leaped to his feet, he heard a piece of one buzz by his ear.

There was a man by Nell's side and as the two rushed forward, Nell heard a sound as though some one had struck this man with a fist. The man went down in a heap. Nell heard the gun hammering and some one crying to him to lie down. A single look around showed him men diving to earth, leaping to shelter of trees, or disappearing into the trench.

He got behind a tree and tried to push himself into the ground. The ground was too hard and his gas mask in the way. When the gun fired, he could hear the bullets thudding into the tree.

This was discouraging to say the least. Nell dared not move an inch. The rush had disorganized the squads so that the corporals could no longer control them, and each man did as he saw fit. There was a great deal of indiscriminate grenade throwing, some rifle firing, and occasional yelling. There was a little shoot, a sucker, growing out of the tree root about two inches from Nell's head. When the top half of this sucker jumped slightly and then fell to the ground, Nell gave a gasp and decided to retreat. He inched his way backward, keeping the tree between him and the enemy. Things were too warm right there.

MEANWHILE time was flying. The mist was beginning to burn off and the woods were getting lighter and hotter. Nell wished he could unhook his blouse collar but he dared not raise up enough to get at it. He began to wonder if he would get out of this alive, and how long the squad would stay there, and what there was to be done if the machine-gun could not be captured.

Then beyond the trench a way he heard a coughing explosion, a sound like a man falling down a flight of stairs, and a crash as though the supposed man had landed on a pile of tin pans. A most tremendous cloud of smoke boiled up, there was a wild yell, and men began running past him. Nell jumped up and joined them.

There was a great deal of shouting, cries of "Here they are, the ——," "Don't that beat ——!" and "Don't gang up, men, don't gang up, there are other guns about!"

There was a pushing crowd there, men coming in trying to see, and men going away trying to shove back the newcomers. A man with captain's bars pinned to the pocket of his blouse began to take men by the shoulder and shove them bodily away, and Corporal Meade appearing, he gathered Nell and the rest of his squad, and led them back the way they had come. Spagett and Goodrich appeared from somewhere and Curran with his vase.

"You want to shake that —— thing," said the corporal, " 'cause when the sun comes out it's goin' to shine on it and give us all away. Now no more talkin'. These guns are gettin' thick an' we make noise enough without chewin' the rag."

Then, though Nell was burning to ask what had happened and how the gun had been destroyed, they went forward in silence, listening, halting and looking carefully about, and going forward again.

From time to time Nell would hear whistles blown, two together, then two more blasts, and each time the corporal would hearken till he located the sound, and several times he changed the direction of the march.

Nell decided that the whistle was the platoon's commanders, and that he was blowing it to let the squads know the proper direction to take. Sometimes they heard distant firing, shouts, the crashing of grenades, but in front of them there was no resistance.

They captured two pallid youths with a light machine-gun, and dragged a man from under a bush—what he was doing there was a mystery—but except for that they saw no enemy.

The woods grew thinner and finally ended on the edge of a small field, on the other side of which they began again. The sun was out now and blazing cheerfully.

"Hold up a minute for the rest of the gang," directed the corporal. "We don't want to start across this pasture all by our lonesome. There may be Boche in the farther woods."

"There they go," announced one of the other men suddenly, pointing to a line of men starting out from the woods.

"Come on," said the corporal, and they went out across the field, for all the world like a crowd of picnickers.

Five steps they took, and a low moan welcomed them, a moan that became a shriek, and as every man hit the ground, ended in a short sharp explosion. Nell raised his head. There was a cloud of black smoke drifting away and men getting up and moving forward again.

"Good enough," said the corporal, looking all around to see that his squad was intact. "I guess there's no more machine-guns if they've begun to shell us."

"How do you suppose they see us?" asked Spagett. "I don't see no balloon."

"I can give a guess," said the corporal.

He tipped his head back and shading his eyes with his hand, looked into the sky.

"I thought so," he muttered. "See the ——?"

He pointed and Nell could see a tiny far away gleaming thing, no larger than a bird, a bird that wheeled and dipped and circled and hovered over them, very, very high.

"That's a plane," said the corporal to Nell. "He's directin' the Boche artillery."

"Won't our guys drive him away?" asked Nell.

All laughed harshly.

"Let 'em try it," said one scornfully.

Another shell arrived and after flopping until it had burst, the line went forward again.

"They don't hit any one," said Nell. "The bunch all get right up again."

"The guys that are hit don't," said the corporal. "See them stretcher bearers?"

He pointed to a pair of men with a long pole-like affair over their shoulders. As Nell watched, these men put down their pole and knelt in the grass.

"They're right on the job," observed Nell.

"Oh, it's early in the day yet; they ain't lost their courage," said Spagett.

"I wonder would they have anything good for a boil?" said Goodrich. "I've a good mind to ask 'em."

"I'll cure it for you," said the corporal, pretending to unfix his bayonet. "Where is it?"

"Uh," said Goodrich, "it ain't no joke, believe me. I wish you had it on the end of your nose."

Into more woods, where they were delayed a while by some wire, but the wire had no defenders and after the stretch of wood had been crossed, the men came to a field, gleaming hot under the sun, and on the far side of the field could see a town.

A road entered the town, its course marked by telephone poles with their porcelain insulators glittering, and when one stepped a little to one side he could see a second town behind the first. A long blast of the whistle and the line lay down. Shells fell at irregular intervals, but there was no other firing, and the white houses of the town gleamed peacefully.

"There's our meat," said Spagett, "that town. I bet we're goin' to take it."

"If the Boche don't want it," grunted the corporal, "but I don't guess we'll have much trouble. Jerry don't seem to have a whole lot of pep today."

"Say, what happened back there in the woods," asked Nell, "when we were held up so long?"

"Oh," cried several at once, "the Boche had chicken wire over their gun."

"Chicken wire?"

"Yeh," said the corporal. "They have a big piece of chicken wire on a slant, held up by poles, and when you throw a grenade at it, it bounces back. The harder you throw it, the harder it bounces. Then when you jump up to rush, they let you have a fistful of bullets."

"Gee, they nailed young Bottle to the mast all right!" said one of the men. "He stopped about six bullets."

Nell looked around in astonishment. Sure enough, one of the men was gone, the man called Bottle, and there were only six and the corporal left.

"Well," went on the corporal, "we'd have been there yet, only some one in the other company got word to a trench mortar an' they come up and put the skids to 'em. One o' them bombs is worser than a shell. It knocks everything within twenty yards for a crape. Here comes the old man, how's every one fixed for reserve rations and ammunition?"

The captain, accompanied by the platoon commander, was going along the line ininspecting the men.

"Every man have plenty of ammunition," said he. "I want you corporals to be on the job. We've got a battle ahead of us and any man that lays down I'll speak to him about it. God help any one that gets gassed or has shell shock. He'll wish he was dead and no mistake. You might as well eat a meal now, but don't waste any food; you'll wish you had it later."

THE men thereupon took out their cans of hardtack and opened some beans, which, spread on the hardtack, went very well. This was breakfast and dinner combined, and they had for accompaniment the shells bursting between them and the riverbank.

"Wouldn't you think they'd have brains enough to shell the woods?" asked Nell. "They must know we're in here."

"That's Fritz' way of tellin' us we'll be all right if we stay where we are," said the corporal. "If they shelled us here it wouldn't make no difference whether we stayed here or went out and chased across the field, but when a guy knows that he ain't goin' to get shelled in the woods, he ain't too eager to run out of 'em and once he gets out he'll come back right *priesa* the first minute he gets the chance. I don't think we'll have any trouble, though. Fritz is moving back his guns and won't have very many to bother us with."

"Here's action!" cried Spagett.

He pointed back in the woods a way, where a group of officers were standing together.

"That's the battalion P. C.," said the corporal. "Every one remember where they saw it, we may need to send a runner back some time."

"There's a runner just come in to them," said Spagett. "I bet he brought an attack order."

"That's what," agreed every one. "There go the company runners."

Men began to run from the group to all points of the compass, forward to the assault companies and back to the support. All the men began hastily to strap up their haversacks, look to their rifles and the adjustment of helmet and gas mask.

There was a long moment of tense waiting, then the soft trill of the whistle, and the line went forward at the platoon commander's signal. They marched to the edge of the woods, they left the woods and entered the field, they proceeded through the field.

"No business," said the corporal hopefully.

"Betcha they're settin' their s-s-sights!" remarked Curran, his voice shaking ever so slightly.

Machine-guns began to mutter over on the left. The gunners in the town were firing on the troops in that section of the advance, but in front of Nell's company there was no excitement. Then, suddenly, like the first drops of rain before a thunder shower, a few shells burst here and there.

While the smoke of them still curled about, the enemy barrage began. The shells sounded like a horse walking on a hard pavement, and they fell with about the same speed and regularity as the supposed horse would put down his feet one after the other. Nell noticed that the men were not lying down for the shells now.

Indeed, if they did they would spend all their time lying down and getting up and would have none left for the advance. Nell kept his eyes straight to the front and kept his feet moving.

When he heard a man cry out, he did not look to see what had happened to him. When a fountain of dirt and smoke leaped up in front of him, and the dust of it nearly blinded him, he kept right on going while he cleared his eyes. He watched the corporal all the time.

"If I'm ever going to get my opportunity," said Nell to himself, "it'll be sudden, like all opportunities are. I'm thankful I'm a cavalryman, they're trained to recognize the right instant to seize a chance and turn it to a glorious victory. And if my chance comes, I want to have some idea how these doughboys fight. I'd look fat giving them 'fours right,' and 'prepare to fight on foot.' "

The advance crossed the road they had noticed before they left the woods and took shelter in a ravine on the far side. The men of the fourth squad lay panting on the grass and muttered to themselves. Curran bound up a puttee that had come loose.

"Where the ——'s our artillery?" said he. "Takin' a day off? I ain't heard a shell go all day."

"They're doin' their stuff," said Goodrich. "See up on that hill there?"

He pointed to a hill beyond the farthest town, where white clouds told of bursting shells. The nearest town was almost directly to their left now, a mass of white buildings, surrounded by a sort of thin haze. From time to time white smoke would float over the roofs or gush from the windows of a house. In the fields before the town, Nell could see men running, advancing, lying down and then retreating.

"There's machine-guns in there," said Spagett. "They're givin' the second battalion ——. If the attack keeps on we won't get no notice from there, but if that battalion quits and falls back to reorganize, oh man, they'll run us outta these fields like kids out of a orchard."

The advance began again by squads, the old fashioned squad-rush. One after the other, the squads jumped to their feet and ran forward a little way, then lay down.

"Now then," said the corporal, "everybody get set! Come on!"

They stood up and went forward. Nell heard a clank and Curran cried out. Nell looked and saw the other man come to a halt and try to tie himself in a knot.

"Come on!" cried the corporal. "This is no place to match pennies! What the —— you stoppin' for?"

"They socked one through my vase!" panted Curran, running forward again.

The corporal laughed heartily and when the squad had come up on the line and laid down the men rolled with laughter.

"It ain't no —— joke," said Curran. "Hey, can you see where it went?"

He appealed to Nell, who, turning over, examined the vase. The bullet had gone through the base, making a round hole, and had come out the top without further damage.

"It isn't hurt much," said Nell. "The hole is in the bottom. You'd never know it was there when you set the vase on end."

"Well, that's cheerin'," said Curran.

"I don't know why we're advancin' this way," commented the corporal. "There ain't much fire here. Maybe the rest of the line is gettin' it. Well, here we go again! Come on!"

After the second rush, the word was passed along to change direction. The next rush brought the men across a narrow gage railroad and found them facing the nearest town. There was a marsh within a few yards of them that betokened the presence of a river. They could also see the ruins of a bridge between the two towns.

Faint yelling on the left betokened the beginning of the assault of the nearest town, and during the next rush of the squad Nell could see Americans running about in the streets.

The noise of the battle increased tenfold, as if the enemy snarled in rage at the loss of the town. Machine-gun fire opened upon the men from the heights beyond the farthest town, artillery redoubled its activity, and great things like pigs began to sail through the air and fall with deafening explosions that drowned all other sound.

"Minnies an' machine-guns," muttered the men, and began to look questioningly at the corporal.

"Don't get excited," said he, "they won't leave us here very long."

He was right, for it was but a minute before the word came down the line to fall back to the shelter of the railroad track, and this the men did, with astonishing celerity.

"Now I suppose," said Goodrich, "we dig in. They couldn't have picked a better place for it. All the Boche have to do is to shoot at the railroad track and they know they'll hit us."

THE man beside Nell gave a dry cough and rolled upon his side, then rolled back again. Goodrich, who was on the other side of the man that had coughed, looked at him intently.

"This guy's hit," said Goodrich. He rolled the other man on his back. "He's dead, too. That leaves six of us, two new guys and the four old-timers!"

"See that town across the river," said the corporal to cause a diversion. "Don't look now, for ——'s sake, you'll get one through your skull, but look the next time you get a chance. Well, that's the nut we've got to crack. There won't be no counter attack, cause of the river. When we get across that brook, watch out for a hot time."

Farther down the track some men were trying to dig in, but so many were hit that the attempt was given up.

"I hope we don't stay here long," continued the corporal. "If we should get the order to fall back to the woods, I wouldn't be a bit disappointed. Then we could come out again after dark. This is fierce. We can't even get a chance to dig a hole."

"Well, what are we waiting for?" cried Nell, after a long time.

The inaction was getting on his nerves. It was not so bad to advance, even if the fire was hot, for he was moving, getting down and getting up, and the physical effort required helped to keep his mind from the danger, but while he lay on the ground and heard the shells strike, and the machine-gun hammering, and the men calling, he began to feel his courage weaken.

"Don't get in a sweat," advised Goodrich. "We'll do our stuff soon enough. We're waitin' while the artillery shells some of those Boche guns and those minnies up on the hill there. Then when we move out the goin' won't be so rough."

Then in response to some signal that Nell did not see, the corporal retired like a crab, backward, and went out of sight.

"Non-coms front and center," suggested Spagett. "Now we'll have some fun!"

When the corporal returned the expression of his face betokened anything but fun.

"This platoon's going over as a patrol," said he, "advance by individuals. Proceed at the whistle. The general attack won't be made until tomorrow, because the engineers have got to put up a bridge. Now then, Curran, take off that —— piece of brass pipe, because they can see you going through the reeds with it and you'll be killed. Now take it off!"

This being a direct order and disobedience to it a serious thing, Curran took off the vase. Then he inspected his gas mask, adjusted his belt and made ready.

"Go ahead," said the corporal. "Goodrich, you follow him in three minutes. I'll give you the word."

"I'm glad that boil o' mine is in back and not in front," said Goodrich.

"Some Boche may save yuh the trouble of havin' it cut," laughed Spagett.

"That's right," agreed the other. "That'll be a comfortin' thought every time I cross a open space."

Goodrich got away into the marsh, and the corporal turned to Nell. "You new man, there—er—Colburn, you're next."

When the corporal nodded, looking up from his wrist watch, Nell, taking his bearings from the church steeple in a town to the left rear, slid over the railroad track and into the marsh. It was a lot like diving into cold water, the worst of it was getting in. After he had begun to crawl he had no apprehension, only a lively interest as to what it was going to be like across the river.

"This scouting," said Nell to himself, "is something I can understand. I may not savvy very much about taking machine-guns, but when it comes to making a reconnaissance or knocking over a few with the rifle, I won't stand back for any of 'em."

He got through the marsh without any more excitement than a bath of mud when a shell burst within a yard of him and came out on the riverbank, where the rushes were very high, and where the pitch of the opposite bank protected him both from observation and fire.

He could see down the river here, to where soldiers were crossing on the fragments of the old bridge. They crept along, swinging under the arches, jumping from one junk of shattered masonry to the other, some wading waist deep, and when they had reached the far bank they crawled up and disappeared over the edge. As well as Nell could see, the crossing was not being opposed. Up river was a sharp bend.

"Now," said Nell, "I've crossed a few rivers in my time, and I don't think they're much different here than they are in Mexico. I'll bet there's a ford below that bend."

He crawled up the rushes a way, though it was terribly hot and the rushes like so many knives slashing at his face, and when he sounded cautiously with his leg, he found a ford, sure enough. There must be a bar there going diagonally across to the far bank. It was not very wide, though, and it petered out a little when it got to the other bank, but it was a good place to know about, and Nell tied a strip of bandana handkerchief to a bunch of rushes so that he could find the ford again if he were returning in a hurry.

If he had been a more experienced soldier, that is, more experienced fighting machine-guns, he would have looked very carefully for strings or wires near that ford, that would give the alarm to guarding machine guns, but he did not look for them, and even when he saw a piece of broken string floating in the current on the far side of the ford, he thought nothing of it.

When Nell came under the shelter of the other bank he removed his helmet, put his arm through the chin strap, and unslung his rifle.

"Now then, forward the light brigade," said he, and gritting his teeth and pushing his rifle ahead of him, he eased his way slowly into the rushes, and as the ground became firmer and rose higher, he bent lower and lower until he crept along on his stomach.

He was in a field of uncut wheat here, nearly breast high. He passed a lane, a place in the wheat where some one had cut a swathe, seemingly clear through the field. It went nearly a hundred yards in one direction and in the other ended at the riverbank.

"Now what the —— is that for?" thought Nell. "It must be a path for those squareheads to go down to the bank and back on."

THE path was a fire lane cut by the Boche for their machine-guns and so constructed that a man crossing it at night, a man or a rat even, would be silhouetted against the sky at the far end and the wary gunners at the other end could make a sieve out of him.

The former cavalryman, however, went unscathed. He began to grow confident and to forget that he was on a very dangerous mission. The wheat was thick and he could not see the death that was all around him. Suddenly he came upon a place where another man had crushed the wheat down as he crawled.

Aha! The hunter hunted! Who had done it, German or Yank? Nell would discover. He listened. No sound of movement or of breath. He drew one knee under him and straightened it. No sound. Again he drew up his knee and shoved his body forward. Silence. He rolled upon his stomach and stiffened as if an electric current had passed through him.

"A Boche!" his brain howled. "A Boche!" Outwardly he held his breath.

In front of him, scarcely four yards away, he could see through the stalks of wheat the broken outline of a man. The man was clad in gray, a dirty gray that was almost black. He lay on his stomach, his feet out of sight in the wheat on one side and his head out of sight in the other. He must have been the man who had made the track that Nell was following.

Nell hesitated to attack this man. He might give away the fact that there were Americans in the wheat. In addition, this Boche might be the point of an advance guard, or a flanker for a company. On the other hand, it would not be wise to leave him unmolested, to go back and report.

If he was a connecting file, a flanker or a scout, the battle would be on, but that was a chance that Nell must take. He began to crawl, dragging himself with his elbows closer and closer to the German.

It was five yards to where the German lay and Nell proceeded at the rate of a yard a minute. He could swear, however, that it took him an hour to get close enough to the Boche to see the barrel of a light machine gun. Nell thereupon estimated the situation, as the books say. He had a yard to go. The Boche was facing away from him, his head resting on his arm, squinting along the barrel of his gun. Nell could rush the last yard and bayonet the other man before he could have time to swing the gun about to bear on Nell.

Here, without waiting for command from Nell's brain, his legs gave him a tremendous heave forward, his bayonet flashed in the sun and zipped into the ground under the German's arm, as clean a miss as ever red flag waved for. Nell felt as if a bucket of ice water had been dumped over him, and letting go his rifle and still moving with the momentum of his rush, he leaped upon the German's back and seized the other about the throat with every ounce of strength that he could muster.

"Hey!" said a voice. "Git offa him! I killed him five minutes ago."

A wrathful face peered from the wheat, a lean, hard face, with high cheek bones and lantern jaw, a face surmounted with a steel helmet of American design. Nell got off. He realized the German was dead the instant his hands had seized his throat. Without a word Nell wiped his hands on the German's blouse, very carefully, finger by finger, recovered his rifle, and joined the man in the wheat.

"What the —— d'yuh mean makin' all that noise?" whispered the other man.

"How would I know he was dead?" replied Nell. "Did you expect me to ask him?"

The other man grunted scornfully. Swiftly he flattened himself on the ground, all but his head, but he kept his face up and resting his chin on the ground scowled very fiercely straight to the front. Nell followed his example. He could hear a number of men coming toward them through the wheat. The newcomers came cautiously along, the sound of them showing that they were moving very slowly on hands and knees.

Nell noticed that the other man had no rifle, but held a long triangular knife with a very large guard in one hand, and a bomb in the other. Nell looked at the blade of the knife and then looked rapidly away again. He clenched his fists and ground his teeth one upon the other, but in vain.

War is tough on the stomach in more ways than one, and the sight of a knife blade still smoking from a jugular vein is liable to upset the strongest. When Nell was himself again he shook the tears from his eyes and prepared to do battle. The hard-boiled man with him glared at him with naked teeth.

"——!" he hissed.

There was silence in the wheat. The other men had heard and halted. There was a thud and Nell's startled eye beheld a black pear-shaped object just under his nose, a thing of metal, cut into many tiny squares. The thing sizzled like a boiling kettle. A hand licked out and the bomb was gone. Bong! It exploded some distance away and stones and little bits of wheat stalk rained down on Nell and the hard-boiled man.

"Come on," said the hard-boiled man in a low voice, "we're a couple of Yanks!" and he gave the name of his company commander.

The wheat parted and lo, appeared Corporal Meade, with Spagett, Goodrich, Curran, the platoon commander, non-commissioned officers and soldiers. They spoke profanely.

"What are you doing here?" asked the corporal.

"I came across at a ford," said Nell, "and came right along."

"You certainly went fast," said the lieutenant. "I'd advise you not to make so much noise. We thought you were Boche and threw a bomb at you. We had no idea you'd be up here so soon. We didn't know there was any one in front of us. Come, no more talking. Let's get where we can see something. The wheat ends pretty soon."

Then he led the way forward about ten yards, where the wheat stopped at a low belt of barbed wire. They all lay down, while the officer reconnoitered.

Nell could see, through the stalks of wheat, green hills striped with yellow and bands of darker green, sweeping up to the sky in the distance. Lower down a row of poplars marked a road, the road itself hidden by a railroad embankment. The town was on the left, half hidden by trees, but with the outlying houses painly visible.

Nell noticed how silent and peaceful everything looked. It did not seem possible that there was a fight going on. Yet the distant heights were wreathed in smoke from the bursting shells, and the houses of the town shone through a faint haze, a sort of blur, like the heat waves that rise in front of a man's sights on the target range. Machine-guns were doing their duty there and doing it nobly.

"Heads up," whispered the returning lieutenant. "I think we can make it to that railroad track; there doesn't seem to be any one in the fields. The firing in the town is all on the men trying to cross up there. I think we would have been fired on before now if there was anything stirring here. Now we'll cross the field by twos at intervals of about ten yards. I'll lead. This wire out here isn't very thick and we can get through it all right. I've cut a lane."

AWAY went the lieutenant and after him two more. The platoon sergeant timed the advancing men and sent out the next two men when he thought proper.

"These guys aren't so wise after all," thought Nell. "If they were sent to reconnoiter the north bank, then they've gone too far inland. And if they were sent to get contact with the enemy, the patrol is too weak. That looey is going to keep on until he gets himself into trouble."

Nell looked about him for a way of retreat in case of need. The wheat was no place to go, for, though it shielded a man from observation, it would not protect him from gun-fire and a little sweeping from machine-guns would dispose of all the men hiding in it.

It was Nell's turn to go before he had made up his mind what to do. He had joined his squad and found himself beside Spagett. Neither spoke to the other, but crept across the field. Their faces were strained and their eyes fixed on the railroad track as a man, swimming and not very sure of reaching the shore keeps his eyes on the beach.

Nell kept wondering what he could do in case of accident. He had come up to the front for a distinct purpose, but that purpose was not to get himself killed. At last they reached the railroad embankment and turning about in its shelter, they could lay on their backs against it and look back at their own lines while they waited for the rest of the men to cross the wheat. The far bank of the river seemed a long way off.

"Corporal," said the lieutenant, "skip over the track and see what's on the other side. We might as well be doing something while we're waiting for the rest of the men."

The corporal got up and crouching as low as he could, climbed the railroad bank. Nell's roving eye discovered an arch of smoke-stained granite that was built into the side of the embankment.

"Me for that place," he thought, "when the fun begins."

There was a scurrying sound from the top of the embankment and a piece of ballast rolled down, clattering. The corporal appeared with white face and bulging eyes.

"Hey!" he cried. "The whole German army's on the other side o' this thing an' comin' like ——!"

The men leaped to their feet, but before the officer could utter a word, a mass of men poured over the track like a wave over a sandbar. The Germans looked like a lot at first sight, like a young army, but when the Americans leaped to their feet and began shooting, they discovered that there were not so many after all.

The Germans were considerably taken aback at seeing so many of their enemies and almost before the fight started it was over, the Germans going back across the track and the Americans being pulled down off the bank by the officer. Nell had not fired a shot.

"Come on," cried the officer. "They'll be back with their friends in a minute; let's be going! Now what the ——!"

In the field, the men who had been crawling when the fight started, had leaped to their feet to come to their comrades' assistance. Several of them lay plainly in view, but in that tossed-away, all-in-a-heap attitude that means but one thing.

"Who the —— done that?" muttered the men.

Two more men out in the field leaped to their feet and made a dash for the wheat. They threw themselves to earth after running a short distance, but did not get up again, and the Americans under the railroad could see that they were motionless.

"Look at the wheat!" said Nell.

The wheat swayed and rippled as if it bowed before a strong breeze, but there was no breeze in that hot lifeless air. Nell listened. The clatter of machine-guns was clear and distinct. They were searching that wheat and when they got through, there would not be so much as a field mouse alive in all that sector of riverbank.

A stick bomb, a German contraption that looks like a potato masher, clattered down the stones of the embankment. The officer seized it and tossed it back, none too soon, for it exploded in air and one of the Yanks was hit by the fragments.

"I say over there," called a voice with a very British accent, "you'd better surrender, you know, or we'll make proper giblets out of you."

"Come on over and try it," called the lieutenant.

He hurled a bomb straight into the air as high as he could.

"They won't throw that back," he cried.

The bomb rushed back to earth on the

other side of the track and by the sound exploded about a foot above the ground.

"Everybody!" cried the officer. "Let 'em have it!"

Over the bombs went, the sound of them like a young barrage.

"Now then," shouted the officer, "every man for himself! Into the ditch and follow it to the river!"

There was a ditch that ran from the culvert Nell had noticed, down to the wheat, where it disappeared. It was a very shallow one and Nell wondered why he had not crossed it in the wheat. Perhaps it turned in a different direction when it got out of sight.

Nell had hesitated a few seconds to get his bearings, and so was a little behind the others as they rushed for the shelter of the ditch. Machine-guns cackled excitedly and the men began to drop.

The officer was hit, he went to his knees, and Nell saw the bullets whip through his blouse as he used to watch them make holes in a paper target when he was marking in the butts. The men began to throw away their rifles.

"Here! Cut that out!" roared Corporal Meade. "Keep your heads! Into the ditch!"

The men heard and blindly turned for the ditch into which they dived. *Pht!* went the bullets into them. Some lay still, others got up and tried to get out again. Some cried a warning and died with it on their lips.

Corporal Meade seized Spagett's hand and tried to drag him to safety, but the bullets found them both.

That sight maddened Nell Colburn. He knew nothing about infantry, but he knew a good deal about panic and he knew something about leading men.

"Lie down!" he roared. "They're firing along the ditch! Lie down in the field!"

A bullet nearly tore his gas mask from his neck and he lay down himself.

"Keep your heads, men!" cried Nell. "Lie still and don't move! They've got us cold! If we stay here till dark we can get away."

He repeated this as loud as he could several times. The men must have heard, for they all lay as they were, without moving.

"Don't try to crawl around," ordered Nell. "They can see us from the hills. Don't move a muscle!"

THE guns fired and fired. Those in the wheat would pound away for a long time, then they would stop, and the gun that was shooting down the ditch would carry on alone. This one had a very loud ringing sound, a peculiar clanging, that the others did not have. Nell decided that it must be a different type.

He looked at the blue sky and the fleecy clouds and wondered how long they would last. Would he ever be back on the other side of the river again? Well, at least he would try and give the jerries a run for their money before they killed him.

Whatever happened, he was not going to let himself be shot like a rabbit. When dark came, a man ought to be able to get to the ford. What wise birds these Boche were! They must have had their eyes on the patrol the minute it left the other bank. And they had allowed it to get far inland, too far to get back again, intending, perhaps, to take the whole lot prisoners.

They must have miscalculated the number or they would have sent more men out to do the capturing. And when the men had made their dash for the ditch, the machine-gunners must have lost their heads and let go with all they had. Perhaps they had fired so savagely to be certain that no Yank would go back with information or so to destroy the courage of the Americans that the survivors would surrender without further resistance.

Suddenly the firing stopped. From the direction of the railroad track came a faint calling, but perfectly audible.

"Come on in, Americans, come in, we wont hurt you."

There was no answer from the field.

"Come on," called the far-away voice, "don't you ever want to go home again? You'll be killed if you stay out there!"

The machine-guns began again, the bullets whining and cracking overhead. A *minenwerfer* began to throw rum-jars about. Nell could not tell by the sound where they were going, although he knew they must be very near. The sun beat down unmercifully. Nell knew the men must be suffering from thirst, for he certainly was, but he dared not try to get at his canteen.

At intervals the man on the railroad track called to them to come in. Once, late in the afternoon, a *minenwerfer* bomb landed very close. Among the stones and dirt and bits of sod that rained down after the explosion were little pieces of equipment and a big chunk of O.D. blouse, that fluttered down like a falling leaf.

"Oh, oh, Americans," sang the man on the track. "You'd better come in. Come in and have a cold bottle of beer, we've got lots of it!"

One of the men in the field began to cry and there was a slight stir as of others getting to their feet.

"Lie down!" barked Nell. "The first man that gets up gets a slug of lead through his skull!"

He meant it, too, and after that they made no more moves. The man on the track gave it up after a while and took his haunting voice elsewhere. The afternoon dragged, it seemed weeks long. Nell could hear men sighing from time to time and soft muttering, so that he knew there were some still left alive.

He cursed the summer twilight, but it grew dark in the valley sooner than he expected, for the sun went behind the hills and a mist began to rise from the river.

"Now," muttered Nell to himself, "if we don't get kettled we ought to be able to get out of this place."

All afternoon he had been thinking of plans for escape, trying to remember his progress from the river, where the ford was, what signs of the enemy he had seen in the wheat. He remembered the fire lane and guessed what it was, and he was sure that the ditch turned and went into the river above his ford, so that if he could once get to the river end of the ditch, he had but to work downstream and he would find the ford. The first thing to do, therefore, was to silence the machine-gun that commanded the ditch, and Nell could give a good guess where it was. He felt that he should wait until the night was darker, but his impatience was too great. It was impossible to remain inactive any longer.

"What do you say, gang?" called Nell in a low voice. "Are you with me?"

There were faint mutters of assent.

"Make for the railroad," said Nell. "The machine-gun that's firing down the ditch is in a culvert there. If we can get it, we can go down the ditch to the river and get back all right. Come on, now, take it slow!"

Nell began to crawl back across the field. He heard a man scraping along the ground beside him and was tempted to speak to him, but thought better of it. Machine-guns were rattling with great vigor, and although none seemed to be very near, there was a possibility that there might be some within hearing distance. The other man chuckled happily. Nell stopped in astonishment and the man gurgled again, with every indication of delight.

"Who's there?" whispered Nell, throwing caution to the winds.

"Goodrich," said the other man.

"What's the grand joke?"

"Oh, kid," chuckled Goodrich. "My boil has bursted. I feel like I could lick the whole German army."

"You'll probably get a chance to try," said Nell.

In the shelter of the railroad the men counted noses. It was dark there and their forms would be invisible against the background of rock ballast. Seven men, Nell, Goodrich, Curran, the hard-boiled man, who had knifed the machine-gunner in the wheat, and three others, one of whom was wounded in the arm.

They waited quite a while in case any more should come in, but no one came and at last Nell gathered the men with heads close together and opened a counsel of war. The men accepted his leadership without question. Their main idea was to get back alive and any one who showed any signs of ability to get them there was leader enough for them, regardless of his rank.

* * *

SUDDENLY, as if by prearrangement, the ground between the track and the river was brilliantly lighted. Nell's first thought was "searchlight," but as he lay hurriedly down on his back, he could see that the sky was filled with hanging lights, dazzling white, floating steadily and sending out little streamers of smoke.

"It's lucky we came when we did," thought Nell.

One by one the lights died. Others took their place, but farther down the river and some were fired from the far side of the track that lighted the field, but left the embankment in deep shadow.

"Come on now," cried Nell, "while it's dark."

"There's some o' those —— right around here," husked a voice.

"In the culvert!" said Nell. "Not a sound."

A machine-gun roared into action at their very elbows. There was no time to give directions, nor could they have been heard if they had been. Nell scrambled up the embankment and crawled along its side, the barking of the gun drowning the noise of his feet and the stones rattling down.

He began to fear that he would pass the culvert in the darkness, when a light was fired and he flattened himself against the stones, praying that they would not roll both him and themselves to the bottom of the bank. As it happened, he lay with his face down hill, so that from one eye he could see the other men at the foot of the bank, in single file, flat on their faces, motionless as the dead.

He was alone on the embankment and would have to do his work singlehanded. Darkness again, but Nell had no sooner gathered his legs under him than another cluster of lights blazed and he was forced to lie down again. His position, however, was changed slightly so that he could see out over the field, out to the wheat, where shells were bursting.

Midway between, scattered on the field, were the bodies of the men who had been killed in the afternoon. Then Nell saw the far end of the ditch, its course marked by a black line of shadow. His eye rapidly followed this to where it went out from under the embankment. Man! There was a gun there! He could see it plainly, with a man beside it, and another just at the edge of the bank, kneeling and looking toward the Americans.

As Nell watched, this man bent hurriedly down and seized the shoulder of the man by the gun. He shook it and pointed to the Americans. The other man jumped up and bending over the gun, picked it up clumsily and swung it up on the edge of the ditch. The lights went out as though a switch had been turned.

Nell decided two things, that the men with the gun would fire another light and then begin shooting, and that when the light went up he would make two jumps and either silence the gun or be killed with the rest of them.

Bang! went the pistol. *Pop!* the lights gleamed brightly. Nell made a leap for the culvert edge, landed on his feet, crouching and swaying forward, took a second leap just as the gun gave its first bark. He landed squarely on the shoulders of the kneeling German, knocked him over across the gun, and Nell, gun and Germans went backward into the ditch, with Nell still holding the other's collar in a death grip.

The man squirmed and writhed. His body heaved under the Yank's knees, his hands tore at the Yank's clothes, his nails scratched at the Yank's face, but Nell hung on. A flying body struck him in the back and knocked him forward on to his antagonist, a foot crunched against one of his hands, something struck him over the head and nearly knocked him senseless. Meanwhile he hung to his German.

He had the other's coat collar twisted in his hands and he had his thumbs into the German's neck as far as he could shove them. He intended to hang on until he was killed, and something told him that he had a good leverage on the other, for the man's struggles grew perceptibly weaker. There was grunting, splashing, and thrashing bodies all about, but Nell did not hear them.

A light went up, and its glare shone full into the ditch, but Nell paid no heed. He saw a man's head under his hands, and the back of a blouse, and a shoulder strap with 121 on it. When the light went out the German had ceased to struggle.

Nell got very stiffly to his feet. Another light lightened the field, and across it two Germans, their coat tails right out straight, were taking their hurried way. Some one grunted and hurled a bomb after them. It burst and the two running men gave a little jump, as moving picture comedians do when a pistol is fired at them, but kept on running.

Then they must have been seen from the farther bank, for one of them dropped, got up again, ran a few feet and then went down for good, and his companion did what looked like an attempt at a handspring and lay still. Nell was forced to laugh.

The crawling over the stones, and the holding of breath when the lights went up, and his bitter fight with the German had all ended happily, and there were the two jerries running away with a hop, skip and jump as fast as they could. He laughed heartily and his chuckles were echoed from the ditch.

"There's one o' them Huns under my foot as dead as a herrin'," whispered some one.

"See has he got on a *Gott mit Uns* belt!" cried another.

There was a scramble in the dark. Alas,

neither the man Nell had fought with nor the other dead man had on a belt.

"Where did you birds come from?" asked Nell.

"We heard the scrap," said the hard-boiled man in his rasping voice, "an' we wasn't agreeable you should hog it all yourself, so we come a-gallopin'."

"Well, let's get down and see what this culvert looks like," said Nell. "We may have to spend the night in it. Anyway, we've got a gun to knock over a few with, if they try to get rough with us."

* * *

THE culvert was more properly a bridge. There was a tiny stream in the bottom of the ditch, as they found by feeling around in the bottom of it to locate the dead Germans. Nell knew how he had killed his man now. He had held his head under water.

The arch of the culvert went under the embankment, into a hole of darkness. It was solidly built of granite blocks and with the railroad over it would stop anything. It was doubtful if a naval gun could cave it in. No wonder the Boche gunners had picked on it for a place to spend the night in.

"The other end o' this is in Germany," spoke up some one.

"That's right," agreed two or three. "Maybe them Boche'll send a relief through or somethin'."

"Well, where do you suppose it goes?" muttered Nell. "I can't see anything at all. You'd think you could see the sky through the other end."

A light went up from the far side of the track, but though it lighted the field and the embankment and shone into the bottom of the ditch it did not illumine the darkness of the culvert.

"There's a bend in it, that's what," decided Nell. "That's why we can't see through it. Maybe it doesn't go through to the other side even."

"Captain," rasped the hard-boiled man, "let's me an' you go see where it goes."

"I'll go you," said Nell; "somebody give me a knife."

Unfortunately the hard-boiled man had the only trench knife in the crowd and he wanted it himself. Most of the men had left their rifles by the embankment or in the field. Nell had forgotten where he had left his, but one man still had his and tendered Nell the bayonet.

"I'll go first," said the hard-boiled man. "It was my plan in the first place. Now don't ram that bayonet up my neck a mile if I stop quick."

"Don't you guys monkey with that gun while I'm gone either," directed Nell.

Then he and the hard-boiled man got down and began to crawl into the culvert.

Inside there it was cold and damp and when a hobnail rapped a stone the sound rang tremendously. The arch was high enough to sit upright, but not to stand, and while two men could lie abreast in it, with room to spare, they could not crawl that way. So the hard-boiled man led, and Nell after him. It was black as a pocket. They crawled and crawled, and suddenly Nell bumped something soft with his head.

"Shhshsh!" whispered the hard-boiled man in his ear, "have them lunkheads follered us?"

Nell looked back. The mouth of the culvert was perfectly discernable, a square of dark blue against a frame of deep black. Across the bottom of the square were knobs and projections. These were the heads of the men in the ditch, who were kneeling and staring down the culvert. Nell counted carefully. There were five hats there.

"No," he replied, "they're all where we left 'em."

"Then we're goin' to have callers," said the hard-boiled man. "Listen!"

There was a scraping sound in the culvert, that became more clearly audible with every second. The sound could mean but one thing. Men were crawling from the other end of the culvert.

"Get against the wall!" whispered Nell shoving the other man to one side.

If the Boche came around the turn, they would keep to the nearest wall, that is, turning to the left, they would instinctively stick close to that wall and Nell had a hunch that that was the way the bend turned. If he had guessed wrong, then it only meant that the contact would be head on. Nell tightened his muscles. He heard a man breathing.

The man grunted and said something in his natural voice. He was crawling along the right wall and Nell let drive with the bayonet as hard as he could. The man yelled deafeningly. Nell sought and found the other's mouth and clamped a hand over it. Then he shifted his grip to the other's windpipe and tried to get back his bayonet, but it would not respond to his wild tugs. Then instinct told him the man would not make any more noise and he released his throat.

"Come on," cried the hard-boiled man, "the rest of 'em got away, let's get after them!"

Nell began to crawl furiously. The bend in the culvert was very near and after he turned he could see light at the other end, and backs rippling as men crawled along at their best speed. The stones tore his knees and his hands were badly skinned on the side of the culvert, but he kept on and in a few seconds was in the open, listening to pounding feet. The Germans and the hard-boiled man had got out first and had gone into the darkness.

Nell looked about him, like the famous bear, to see what he could see, and, also like the famous bear, he could see nothing but the other side of the track. There was a black field in front of him that might be crisscrossed with trenches or in which a regiment of the enemy might be bivouacking.

He could hear shells socking somewhere in the distance and see the ghostly fountains of smoke that leaped into air after the explosion. He moved along the base of the embankment a few steps, but halted suddenly as he saw a number of black shadows before him. The shadows were motionless and after looking for them for a few seconds, Nell could see that they were knapsacks, twisted overcoats and a blanket or two.

A little further on were some square holes, where a man might take refuge in the event of shells coming too close. Nell thought that the holes were a waste of labor, since the railroad track would be sufficient defilade for any projectile, but Nell was not acquainted with trench mortars, that are designed for the attack of defiladed areas, and that can throw a demijohn of high explosive up into the air and down again so close that its own crew are likely to become casualties from the burst.

"*Psst!*" went some one in the dark.

Nell flattened himself against the embankment, gripping his bayonet.

"Cap'n!" A hoarse whisper.

Nell let a rock roll down the bank, clicking against its fellows, and in a few seconds the hard-boiled man took shape from the darkness.

"Where did you go?" asked Nell.

"I was chasin' that guy. I don't want for to have him go an' get his gang an' come back an' clean up on us."

THE bursting of a light on the other side of the track interrupted. It was well away and the shadow of the bank covered them. The light showed them a field, a narrow cart track crossing it, and the shattered poplars of a high-road.

The stream that flowed in the bottom of the ditch came down through the field to their right at an angle, and it was because of this bend in the stream that the culvert had the elbow in it. The course of it was almost parallel to the embankment. Welcome darkness again.

"How did you make out," continued Nell.

"I got me one o' them *Gott mit Uns* belts," said the hard-boiled man. "I been tryin' to get one for a week."

"Well," said Nell, "we better be goin' back while it's dark. One o' those lights might flash on us any time."

"There seems to be more racket goin' on than before, doesn't there?"

Nell listened. Shells were growling steadily on the other side of the embankment and on the distant road. Every so often he could hear one go rustling by overhead, probably on its way to the German artillery position on the heights above the town.

"Maybe our artillery has snapped out of it," suggested Nell. "Well, anyway, let's go back an' see what's going on with the gang."

They started to go back to the entrance to the culvert, but somebody began to beat upon a tin pan with a stick. This was a new sound to both, but they lay down just the same until it was over. There was no use being able to identify a sound by the feel of its projectiles in one's anatomy.

Nell, however, decided what had made the racket. It was a machine-gun firing inside the culvert, with its muzzle pointing in. It meant one of two things, either the Yanks were trying to work the thing and it had gone off while they were examining it, or the party had been captured or killed by the enemy and the Boche were shooting into the culvert to be sure that there were no more Yanks in there. The bullets, of course, could not come around the bend, but the sound could.

"I guess we won't go back that way," said Nell. The gun stopped firing after a minute or two, but that was no sign that it wasn't there any longer and ready to fire again at the slightest sound.

"What's the mad rush to get back?" asked the hard-boiled man. "We're just as safe here as we are there. We're safer. We ain't gettin' any fire here from either side and on the other side the track both the jerries and our own guys are lettin' fly. We're goin' to get perforated anyway, but there's no hurry about it."

"No, I want to see what's goin' on," said Nell. "The main object of this here war party is to take seven whole skins back across the river and if there's a way to do it, it's goin' to be done. An' that way won't be found by stickin' around here."

"Lead the way, Cap'n!" said the other.

"Over the top we go," said Nell, and began to scramble up the embankment.

He forgot entirely that there were men with ears all around him, nor did it occur to him that if a light went up just as he reached the track, that *his* light would be extinguished, and that with most astonishing rapidity.

"Hey!" panted the other man. "Wait a minute! There's a train comin'!"

A train! A train on this track that had borne no traffic since spring! By golly, there was one coming at that. The Boche must have an armored train running. The two men crouched on the stones. The rails hummed and sang, and Nell could hear the rattling of the wheels. He cautiously lifted his head. There was a line of sparks along the rails, a glittering line of fire that stretched clear down around the curve.

Nell ducked and waited for the train to go by. The sound continued, but no train appeared, nor did the rattle and song of the rails grow in volume as it would if wheels were making it. A hand plucked at Nell's coat.

"Let's get outta here," cried the hard-boiled man at the top of his voice, the words, however, only barely audible. "Come on offa here. There's a machine-gun barrage goin' on this track!"

Nell went to the bottom of the embankment in one jump. Train indeed! The Yanks must be putting down the barrage, for if it had come from Nell's side of the track he would never have got as far up the bank as he had.

No wonder it sounded like a train. There were perhaps thirty or forty machine-guns firing and each one doing better than a hundred shots a minute. The bullets were rattling against the rails and striking sparks from them. The two men went down and sat wordlessly in the shadow of the bank.

"Let's have a listen at the culvert again," suggested the hard-boiled man after a while.

There being no objection to that, they crawled to where the culvert opened, and harkened.

"——!" they both gasped. "There's guys comin' through!"

"Hark!" said Nell. "They're talkin'!"

There was the familiar scraping sound of crawling men and muttering of voices. The two craned their necks into the ditch and then the voices were audible, so close that it seemed the men must be at the very entrance of the culvert.

"I tell yuh it's mine!" said a voice in the culvert.

"Like so much pig bristles!" scoffed another. "I found it, didn't I?"

"Aw, grapenuts!"

"No, grapenuts, neither! Who killed that jerry anyways?"

"Go on! Go on!" cried several. "For ——'s sake git goin'! Never mind the argument! Move yourself!"

The scratching sounds began again and five shadows emerged from the culvert.

"This is as far as I go," remarked a voice "If them two ain't no more sense than to go curvin' off through the whole Boche arm they oughta be captured."

"This night's so black it would make a nigger look like a snow man," said another.

Here Nell thought best to say a word.

"What the —— do you men mean by leaving your post?" he asked.

There was the sound of five men doing their best to jump right out of their skins

"Is that you?" they gasped. "We thought the Boche got yuh!"

"Well, if they hadn't," said Nell, "you birds would have, only the culvert had a crook in it! Waddyuh mean lettin' that gun go down the alley that way?"

"Oh, man!" said Goodrich. "There was six big krauts come along the ditch an' we staggered outa there. They all ducked into the tunnel, so we hauls the gun off the bank an' turned it down the hole after 'em, but none of us knew how to work it. So while we was monkeyin' with it, the krauts heard us an' they was comin' back to see how come, only the gun went off and stitched a couple o' seams in 'em."

"So then we come through with the gun," said another man. "It's too hot over on that side. There's more iron flyin' around than if it was rainin' hardware stores."

"*Hsst!*" went some one in the darkness. Instant silence. Nell listened to the blood pounding in his ears.

"Now what?" he thought. "If it isn't one thing in this war it's six!"

"*Hsst!*" went the mysterious man again. "Come over here! I found some chow!"

THE pile of blankets and overcoats about the holes under the bank marked the place where the machine-gun crew had slept during the day and where men off duty rested during the night.

There were several mess kits stacked up very neatly and the hard-boiled man had discovered them. They had a kind of slum in them, with bits of something that tasted like sausage floating around. The Yanks had not eaten since they could remember, and the slum tasted doubly good on that account.

The night began to grow cold and the men were more or less wet from crawling around in the water in the bottom of the ditch, but they wrapped themselves in the German overcoats and were quite comfortable. One of the men began to prowl around and explore. As it happened there was no whispering going on at that minute nd so the sound of him taking the lid off a ess kit was clearly heard.

"What's in that?" asked the hard-boiled man curiously.

"Nothing," said the other man quickly.

There was something in his tone that told the rest he was lying.

"Lemme see!" said one of the nearest and they could hear him crawling.

"No," said he solemnly, after a few seconds, "there ain't nothin' in it, just a old empty can."

This man overdid it. He used too much energy in saying that the can was empty. The entire company moved over at once.

"Gimme that mess kit!" cried several at once.

Sounds of strife.

"There's beer in it! —— if it aint full o' beer! You guys tried to hold out on us! All right, you won't get none!"

"The idea," said Nell indignantly, "of you two birds tryin' to hog all this beer! Why there's enough to get a regiment soured! We'll all have a go at it and if there's any left, you can have it."

There was plenty enough for all, however, and the only thing the men lacked to make them at peace with the world was a smoke, but this was impossible.

"Now then," began Nell at what he thought was an opportune moment, "we don't want to lose sight of our mission. I suppose this is or was a patrol to find out the strength of the enemy between the town and the river. Well, we know but it don't do no good unless we get back with it. And it'll be daylight pretty *priesa* and when daylight comes we want to be far from here!"

"Can't we hang out in the culvert durin' the day?" asked one of the men sadly.

"No, we can't!" snapped the hard-boiled man. "What the —— yuh think you're gettin' a dollar a day for?"

"They're playin' —— on the other side the track," said Goodrich. "Man, I'm tellin' yuh it's warm over there."

"Well, its only a question of time before we're discovered and then they'll bring out a gang and do some bayonet drill on us. If we go back, we've got a chance. I know where there's a ford and all we have to do is to follow the ditch to it. We've got a gun an' it don't take but a spoonful of brains to make it go, or the Boche wouldn't be usin' it.

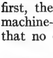
"We'll be comin' down on their riverside guns from the rear, so they wont bother us none. And if any of 'em do get argumentative, we can shoot a yard or two of bullets at 'em."

"Well, so you say," said one of the men, after a long pause, "but I for one don't crave to try to cross that field with all this throwdown goin' on."

"Listen!" said Nell. "I was a sergeant in this man's Army when all you birds knew about Germany was that they made brass bands and beer! Now if there's any —— here that don't want to do as I say, just step right up an' say so like a man, an' he won't need to wait till he gets on the other side o' the track to collect his insurance!"

"Good!" said the hard-boiled man. "You tell 'em Cap'n, an' let me help bury the dead!"

No one, however, accepted Nell's offer and when he gave the word, they all got slowly to their feet and casting off their overcoats and blankets, went down to the culvert and crawled in, the hard-boiled man first, then Goodrich and Curran with the machine-gun and Nell last to make sure that no one got lost in the tunnel.



SOME time before daybreak, the captain of G Company, that held a sector of the line on the south bank of the river, was making his final inspection of the command. There was to be a general advance in an hour and the word had come down from brigade headquarters that the attack must not fail.

The losses so far had already been too high and there was no material gain to show for them. Up-river units of the division had succeeded in crossing the river and maintaining their position on the opposite bank. Down-river patrols had crossed and were holding out, but unless the battalion to which G Company belonged crossed and took the town before it, both right and left flanks would have to fall back.

Divisional and corps artillery had been shelling the German artillery positions on the heights, and machine-gun, one-pounder and Stokes mortar had been hammering the wheat and the field between the river and the railroad embankment since eleven o'clock. The town was being reduced to a pile of unsightly ruins.

The captain, however, was not cheered. He had lost a platoon that had gone on patrol across the river, his men had been without sleep for two nights, their rations were all gone, ammunition was low, grenades were not to be had and about three men out of every squad were casualties.

If the artillery preparation was thorough enough, the task of taking the town would not be very great. Certainly there were enough shells being sent over. The fields and the hillsides fairly glittered with the flashes of the explosions.

It is one thing, though, to fire a bombardment on known gun positions and strong points, but it is another thing to fire blindly into an area, trusting to luck that the hostile positions will be destroyed. The chances of the latter are rather slim. However, the Germans had undisputed control of the air and it was impossible for the allies' reconnaisance planes to take any photographs or even to protect their own lines from aerial attack, so the artillery did what they could and hoped for the best.

They swept up and down the hills and from side to side, the machine-guns laid down a barrage on the railroad and the one-pounders hammered the wheat. The captain of G Company fingered his first-aid packet and was thankful he was not a married man.

"Captain," yelled some one in his ear, "there's a patrol come back!"

"A patrol! From across the river? Where are they?"

"Right over here, sir."

The soldier led the captain to where Nell and his companions crouched in the shelter of the railroad track, the captured gun that they had brought back to the American side of the river at their feet.

"Who's in command here?" asked the captain. "Are you there, Trelawney?"

"The lieutenant was killed," said some one.

"Where's the rest of the men?"

"This is all that are left," said Nell. "I took charge of 'em."

There was a long silence, during which a medical corps man who had been doing up the wounded man's arm put away his bandages and went off.

"What's it like over there?" asked the captain finally.

Nell told him of all that had passed, that the wheat was probably held in strength, but that along the ditch and about the ford there were now no Germans but good ones.

"How do I know that this is straight?" asked the captain. "How do I know you men haven't been cooling coffee over in the wheat all day? This yarn sounds a little high."

Nell made no reply, but tossed something down that clinked. One after the other the men did the same. The captain put down his hand in astonishment. At his feet he felt a pile of leather belts with square buckles, field glasses, a German helmet and several pistols.

"Did you capture that gun, too?" said the captain, in a much milder, even apologetic tone.

"Yessir," said all the men.

"Well, hang on to it and take it back with you when you go. We're going across in half an hour. I'll be back again before we go. I want to know where that ford is."

"They're bound they'll kill us, ain't they?" said some one, after the captain had departed.

There was profane assent, but no one made any further comment. The men who had lost their rifles hunted around until they had found others, and each made sure he had plenty of ammunition. There was a pile of belts that had been taken from casualties and those who were shy anything helped themselves from these.

Suddenly there was a change in the sound of the bombardment, a new note had been struck, some new instrument had joined the orchestra. Then whistles began to blow, and men spoke rapidly, like the members of a football team encouraging each other before the kick-off.

The men that were speaking here, however, were the corporals and sergeants, urging their men to their feet, and giving a few final directions. Nell rose with his remnant of a platoon. The captain suddenly appeared.

"Where's that cavalryman?" he cried. "Here! Show us that ford! Just show me the approximate place. We've got bridges up, but they may not last. Come on, men, forward!"

The line moved over the narrow gage track.

DAWN was just breaking. Things that had been invisible and black were now a light gray. Directly overhead was a patch of rosy sky. In front of the advance, on the opposite bank of the river, was a high white wall, formed by the barrage and a smoke screen. Out of this wall came rocket after rocket, green, red and white. The men got to the river before the counter barrage began to fall.

"How's your boil?" Nell asked Goodrich, who was beside him.

"Boil? It ain't bothered me since it bust. Cap'n, I got more on my mind than boils!"

"If you guys keep on calling me captain," said Nell, "I'll begin to think—*look out!*"

The two went to earth. *BLAM!* Each looked to see if the other was hit, but they were both unscathed, although covered with dirt. They got down to the river, tripping and falling about in the reeds of the marsh, and found a bridge there that the engineers had laid during the night.

The pontoons pitched and heaved and the bridge swayed up and down, for the German shells were lashing the river into waves such as it had never before seen in all its thousands of years of existence. Many of the men were too impatient to await their turn to cross on the bridge, and plunged into the river, half wading, half swimming across.

"Lookit our ford!" said Goodrich, with a slight catch in his voice.

Nell looked. There were guns guarding that ford, and they were whipping the river into foam. There was no reason now why they should hold their fire. This time they wanted to kill, and not to capture.

"Why do you suppose they didn't shoot at us when we were goin' back?" asked Nell.

"Those guns that are doin' that may be clear up in the town," said Goodrich, "or back in the hills. I bet there ain't many guns workin' on this bank, not with that barrage goin'."

From down-stream came a tremendous explosion. Nell did not want to look, but he was unable to keep from turning his head. A bridge down there had just been destroyed and the river was black with the fragments of it, and men struggling in the water.

Nell reached the farther bank and stumbled through the rushes to hard ground. Things were getting lighter every minute, but there was so much smoke about that it was impossible to see more than a yard or two. Nell went into the wheat a way and looked around.

The line had halted and was waiting until all were across the river before advancing. The hard-boiled man appeared, dripping. He had swum the river and was plastered with mud and weeds. A humpbacked man came in from the smoke and fell on Goodrich's neck.

"What the ——!" cried Goodrich.

Nell took a second look at the newcomer. It was Curran.

"What the —— you got on your back?" cried Nell. "I didn't know you."

"My vase," said Curran. "I got it strapped on to me and my blouse over it so's it won't shine nor get hurt. I ain't takin' no chance on losin' it."

"I thought you threw that away long ago!"

"Well, I went and found it again while we was waitin'!"

Some more men arrived, their eyes wide and their breath panting.

"They got our bridge," said they, "blew it all to ——!"

Nell wondered why he had not heard the shell that destroyed the bridge and decided it had been drowned in the tumult. Some more men ran up and then threw themselves down on the line.

"We come across a ford," said they. "The Boche laid off shootin' on it for a minute and we come over."

More men came in, singly and by twos and threes. They were all dripping wet from the river and cursing because their wet clothes hampered their movements. The smoke began to grow thinner. A barrage, like time and tide, has a habit of moving on schedule, regardless of whether the infantry is held up or not. It was now halfway to the town and the advance had not left the wheat.

"Forward G Company," called some one. "Forward!"

"Everybody up!" said Nell.

"All with yuh, Cap'n!" cried the hard-boiled man, and scrambled to his feet.

Some of the men who had heard looked in astonishment at Nell. They noted the cut of his uniform, and decided he must be a strange officer from some other outfit that had joined during the night. The advance began again.

The barrage had passed on. The machine-gunners, who had stayed in their holes while the shells were falling about them, directly the barrage lifted, clambered out, set up their guns and turned loose. The artillery on the heights, able to employ direct fire, began to work overtime. This sleet of steel struck the advancing infantry and they laid down immediately. The machine-guns continued to fire and the artillery tossed shells around, but the men lay still and after a while the enemy turned his attention to the riverbank once more.

Whistles blew and the advance began once more. With a snarl of anger at the Americans' tenacity, the German guns opened on the line again. The sound of the machine-guns was much louder this time, probably every gun in the sector was concentrated upon the infantry in the field.

This was a welcome respite for the engineers trying to construct new bridges, and for the men trying to wade and swim across, but it was hard on G Company. The men were pounded by machine-gun and rifle, by *minenwerfer* and field gun.

"Whoa!" said Goodrich. "I'm hit."

He went down and Nell grabbed his arm.

"Where'd it get you?" he asked.

"'Tain't nothin'," said Goodrich, struggling to his knees. "I just stubbed my toe. Help me up."

He tried to smile, but his face was the color of clay.

"Lie down," said Nell, "the stretcher bearers'll take care of you. Lie quiet, now."

"All right," said Goodrich. "When I'm in hospital I'll have a drink for you."

Then before Nell's very eyes—*thudthudthud!*—there were two holes in Goodrich's blouse and another through his helmet. Nell felt the arm that he was holding grow limp, and he lowered poor Goodrich to the ground again.

Nell gripped his rifle and started forward. His mind was so numbed by his comrade's death that it was a minute or two before he was thoroughly himself again. Then he noticed that there were very few men in sight. The company had been advancing with wide intervals, but there had been a good many men visible just the same.

Now, however, in just that scant space of time, most of them had disappeared. Instead of a hundred or so, there were not more than twenty at the outside. To the left of Nell was a Chaucat gunner and beyond him, about twenty yards away, were two men together.

In front of Nell a little way were Curran and the hard-boiled man, but there was a cloud of smoke from a *minenwerfer* bomb or a shell to the right that hid that part of the line.

Nell felt his rifle shoved back with a vigorous push. He did not need to look at the scar on the butt to know a bullet had hit it. A long blast of the whistle. Nell lay down. In a few seconds the hard-boiled man came crawling back.

"To the rear!" said he. "The old man says to the rear. He give the signal."

After that Nell's recollection was a little dim. He thought he crawled a way, and then ran a way and then crawled some more, but he could not be certain. All that he was sure of was that when he reached the wheat he was on his feet and that he passed two or three men who were doing their best to run. He came to the marsh, where the mud was ankle deep and clinging, but he went through like the ——'s cow. Then he was at the river's edge, where three men were hammering stakes.

"Here comes the bride!" said one of these men.

"Is it pay-day or did you hear mess-call blow?" asked another.

A shell burst up-stream and the falling water showered the men.

"I wish I'd brought my slicker," said the first speaker.

Some more men came down through the marsh and halted. They felt a little foolish at appearing before so many of their comrades in such unseemly haste. Across the river were a lot of men waiting to advance, lying down with very wide intervals, and in the river itself and along both sides were engineers, working as fast as they could to put up bridges to replace those destroyed.

THE fire was not so hot here, but men were being hit just the same and cries for first-aid came with alarming frequency. Across the river a man raged up and down like a madman. If he kept on, he would be hit, but he seemed to care very little. This man was evidently an officer, but he wore no insignia of rank and might be anything from a major up.

He was raging because the companies across the river had advanced too soon, he was raging because the artillery barrage was clear over in the town by now, and particularly did he foam at the mouth because the men in the field had fallen back.

Inasmuch as it would have been murder to keep them there any longer, his remarks as to the color of their livers were very unjust. He also spoke to the engineers. The engineer officer invited him to build his own bridges if he didn't like it.

Furthermore, the engineer officer offered to polish his nose, rank or no rank. In the heat of battle, be it known, a difference of a few numbers of rank amounts to very little between officers of different branches.

The man who raged was the colonel of the regiment. He came to himself after a few minutes and realized that cursing would do very little good. He was not to be blamed for being a trifle emphatic, for his regiment was vanishing into thin air, and as yet he had not gained a foot of ground. So then, he took a good look up and down the river and saw the engineers were making progress after all.

In one place some tree trunks had been thrown across, in another a section of narrow gage track was being lashed to posts, and in a third, enough boats had been collected from the wreckage of the first bridge to make another. The colonel then went back across the narrow gage track to a hole where there were three very sad-looking men armed with pistols. This was the artillery liaison detail, a sergeant and two privates.

"How long would it take to get a message to your guns?" asked the colonel.

"It's about two miles," said the sergeant. "It will take half an hour anyway. Want me to go, sir?"

"No. You stay with me. Send both men, each by a different route, I don't want this message to go astray. Tell your colonel that I want the barrage to start over again. We haven't even got off the bank yet."

The sergeant gave the necessary directions to the men, telling them the route they should follow, and that if they could get into the infantry brigade P. C. they could telephone back the directions. All that they had to do was to say that the barrage should begin again, and that the infantry would move when it did.

The men went out and ducked and dodged across the field to the woods. The sergeant watched them go wistfully. He had little liking for his job, and when the advance began would like it even less.

Meanwhile Nell, on the far bank of the river, laid aside his rifle and pitched in with the engineers. He and the survivors of his company drove stakes, lashed planks, and carried wounded out of the way. Suddenly, some one seized Nell's shoulder. It was the captain, his uniform torn and dirty, and his helmet and gas mask gone.

"Come show us that ditch of yours!" said the captain.

Nell led the way along the bank, sometimes knee deep in mud, and other times up to his shoulders in the water. At last he came out on the shallow bar of the ford. The engineers had discovered it and the bar was marked with a row of stakes. On the opposite bank were machine-gunners and some men with things that looked like stove pipes, and Fourth of July cannon. The stove pipes were mortars and the toy cannon one-pounders.

"Show these officers your ditch!" said the captain.

Nell led them upstream to where the ditch came out on the bank and two of the officers reconnoitered.

"Nothing there but some dead krauts," reported the officer in a few minutes. "Come on, soldier, lead out."

The officer waved to the men across the ford to come over, which they did, holding their weapons out of the water. Then, bending double, they followed Nell and the three officers up the ditch. There had been shelling in that ditch since Nell was in it last. There were holes in it aplenty, along the sides and on the edge. Just now, however, it was blissfully calm.

"It's a wonder we aren't fired on," muttered one of the officers, "we *must* be under observation."

"Cheer up," said the other. "They'll let us set up the guns and then they'll shower down and after that we won't need to worry."

One of these officers was the machine-gunner and the other commanded the one-pounders. Last in line were the trench mortars, and it appeared from the conversation that these were not to fire, but to go forward when the opportunity offered.

The machine-guns were set up, ammunition prepared, and the squad leaders lay down with one hand in air to show that their squads were ready. The section leaders reported ready and the officer commanded:

"Range 1250, at the town. First section right half, second section, left half. Overhead. Commence firing at the blast of the whistle."

The officer turned around.

"I wish you weren't going to fire your —— pop-guns in here," said he to the one-pounder man. "The Boche can hear those things going clear back in the hills and they'll start to iron you out. Meanwhile we'll get ours."

"If you knows of a better 'ole," grinned the one-pounder officer, "go to it."

"You and your better hole," growled the machine-gunner; "wait till the barrage starts, you'll want to find it."

The two officers thereupon sat and bit their thumbs. Nell looked them over. They wore no insignia not even a stripe on the cuff of their blouses, and Nell reflected that his was the better uniform of the three.

"Corporal Davis," said the machine-gun officer, "take two men and find Major Hemenway. I think you'll get him on this side of the river, near that bridge they're making out of the railroad track. Tell him that we're in position in the ditch and that we'll open fire with the artillery barrage. Whenever he wants fire on any new targets, send me a runner."

Waiting for the barrage to start was the most trying time that Nell had yet experienced. The gunners kept inspecting sights and the loaders were forever rattling clips of ammunition. The enemy fire had not ceased a second, but it was all on the far side of the river and on the river itself. The casualties must be terrific.

Nell could hear the shouting and the bawling of orders in the river and decided the men were crossing and coming up into the wheat. He trembled lest the enemy barrage shift from the narrow gage track to the wheat, but fortunately it did not. Suddenly there was a loud *whack* overhead. Four or five shrapnel shells had burst above the field.

"They're white," cried the machine-gunner, "they're ours. Stand by for the barrage; they fired those shells to show the observers where the barrage was going to fall."

The barrage let down with the clap of a closing cellar door, the officer's whistle peeped faintly, and away roared the machine-guns. The distant town suddenly became shrouded in smoke and began to gush gray and yellow clouds of it like a gigantic chimney.

The big eight-inch boys were dumping gas and high explosive in among those houses. The barrage went forward slowly, and the smoke barrage that went with it covered the entire field and shut off the view of the machine-gunners. They continued to fire, however, and trusted that their shooting was effective. Nell watched for the wave of infantry, but saw nothing of them. The barrage passed on, was well into the field, and still he saw no sign of the Americans.

"The —— fools!" he cried, "they've gone and gummed it again."

After a minute or two, by straining his eyes to their utmost, he could see here and there a group of black dots, just visible a second, then gone. They were the helmets of men crawling in the wheat. Higher authority, that is, brigade and divisional commanders, had taken a hand in this thing.

The second attack was more carefully

planned. The machine-guns and one-pounders with Nell were protecting it from the flank, more artillery was being employed to neutralize the enemy fire, and the men, instead of advancing in mass, were going forward in small rapidly moving groups, hard to see and harder to hit. The barrage was going slower, too, much slower than before, and the infantry had plenty of time to blot out a machine-gun here and there, before the enemy gunners could come out of their holes. So with a little less haste and a little more care than the first, the second attack progressed very favorably.

NELL, idly watching one of the flank guns, noticed the squad leader beckon to the sergeant and when the sergeant went over, pointed into the field, toward the railroad track on the right. The sergeant had a look with his glasses, then went for the officer. There was a great deal of pointing and looking and discussion, and finally the officer crept over to Nell.

"What's at the other end of this ditch?" he yelled.

"There's a culvert that goes under the railroad track," shouted Nell.

The lieutenant asked another question, but with the guns pounding and the one-pounder whining, Nell could not hear it, though he could see the cords in the officer's throat working when he yelled. Finally, by putting his cupped hands to Nell's ear, the officer got out what he wanted to say.

"——! are you deaf, or don't you understand English? I say are there any of our troops on the other side of that —— railroad track? For the love of ——, show some signs of intelligence!"

The officer was a bit excited. In the first place his target was obscured by smoke and in the next place one of his guns had come unclamped and had probably been spraying the Americans for an unknown time, and in the third place the fact that the machine-guns had not been fired on was driving the officer mad.

The Boche knew they were there, of that he was certain. They had plenty of guns to shoot him up, and yet they didn't. Something was wrong, and he didn't have the slightest idea of what it was. Nell yelled in his ear twice before he paid any attention.

"There are Boche on the other side of that railroad track," cried Nell. "Boche! Boche! You poor jiggering jug-head!"

He added the last because he thought the officer couldn't hear him. The officer, however, had caught the word "Boche."

He jumped a foot and had another look with his field glasses. Then he handed them, or rather thrust them at Nell and pointed. Nell turned the glasses in the indicated direction. There were some Yanks under the railroad track setting up machine-guns. He handed back the glasses, and the officer proceeded to have a rush of blood to the head, judging by the color of his face.

"Listen!" he bellowed. "If those are our men they've got no business there. Dash and blank and stripe and star and blazes! Are they Boche or aren't they?"

"Want me to go ask them?" asked Nell.

The officer heard *that*, as a deaf man always hears what he isn't supposed to. He gave Nell a dirty look and nodded his head The officer then took another look.

"Jump on the bank!" he cried. "They're looking at us! Tell 'em to come over here."

Nell jumped up and seeing the distant men looking at him, waved his hand. He could see the white of every face looking his way.

"Give me your glasses!" he cried.

The officer saw the gesture if he did not get the words. He handed up his glass. Nell took one look.

"They're Boche!" he cried. "They're Boche! Their uniforms are dry as a bone! If they came across the river they'd be all mud and wet!"

The officer could not hear him and Nell shouted the word "Boche" in his ear as loudly as he could, but the officer shook his head. He was not going to turn his guns on some Americans just because he didn't know where they came from and Nell said they were Boche.

Then Nell gave a real screech and seized the officer's arm. The officer followed Nell's horror-stricken gaze. The gun on the right was out of action, its crew lying quietly beside it, two of the next gun's extra men were in heaps, and a third was tearing open a first-aid packet. A blood soaked puttee told what he was going to use it for.

The lieutenant started across the ditch and went down as if the earth had caved in under him. Nell still had the glasses and these he turned on the men by the embankment. They were still looking his way, but their guns were not the ones that were doing the killing.

"You boob!" cried Nell to himself. "In the culvert, of course!"

There was a gun there, sure enough, with men in O. D. around it. Nell fled. He was outside the ditch and so just safe from the machine-gun's fire. He ran with all his might, the one thought in his mind that trench mortars were death on machine-guns and that in the lower end of the ditch were trench mortars.

As Nell approached the lower edge of the ditch he saw that there was some confusion there. The one-pounder squads were hurriedly getting out, several wounded men were on the crest of the ditch, and officers and non-coms were exercising their lungs.

The first casualties from the machine-gun in the culvert had not been noticed, but when three guns went out of action, the cessation of sound was easily noticeable.

It was also possible for the men in the remaining sections to make themselves heard, nor did it take very long for them to discover the direction the firing was coming from. Some went out on the front edge, others to the rear. No attempt was made to reply to the fire, the main idea was to get out of the way of it.

At this stage of affairs Nell arrived and seizing a sergeant by the arm, imparted the news that there were Boche in Yank uniforms setting up guns and that the gun that was shooting down the ditch was in the culvert. The sergeant dragged Nell to an officer.

"In the culvert, huh?" cried the officer. "Up the ditch? Well, we'll know where to go then. Let's change position and —— quick or we won't have a man left."

He blew his whistle and waved his arm wildly. Then he sent a runner to the trench mortar men, who were on the other side of the ditch, preparing to go forward to the infantry.

The effective range of a trench mortar is only seven hundred yards and they had been left in the ditch until the infantry had got to that distance from the town, and a favorable position for the employment of the mortars had been found.

"Meanwhile," said the officer, "let's have a look at the Boche-Yanks. We don't want to go shooting up our own men. Mustn't trespass on the artillery's privileges. Show us 'em."

It was rather difficult to see because of the smoke, but the officer, wriggling like a snake, moved around until he got his glasses on the gun crews by the embankment and Nell saw his jaw muscles tighten. Then ensued some directions in pantomime, and the gun crew began to leap from shell hole to shell hole. The officer stayed where he was to adjust fire.

Ping! went the one-pounder. The officer signaled some correction and the gun fired again, very rapidly, for fifteen or twenty seconds.

"That's a bunch of dead Yanks or a bunch of dead Boche now, one or the other," said the officer, slipping down into Nell's shell hole, "but I think they're Boche. As you say, they don't look as if they came across the river and I'll bet the reason there was no fire on this ditch was because the Boche artillery was told to lay off any Yanks they saw in it.

"Anyway, Yanks have no business being out there on the flank that way. The wise eggs even had Hotchkiss guns to shoot with. Now about these birds in the culvert. They're still firing down the ditch. They got the runner I sent to the mortar outfit. Let's see if we can't dig 'em out There's no crossing the ditch with them in there."

The gun advanced and Nell went with the officer, telling him how the culvert had an elbow in it and how deep it was, and the officer cursed because half of his platoon had gone with the trench mortars just at the time when he needed them most.

"Say!" cried the officer suddenly. "You better skip over to whoever's in command of the advance now and tell him his machine-gun support on this flank is no more. I'll drop a couple of shells at the entrance to that hole, and you run before the smoke clears. We may be all day getting that bunch out of there."

NELL wondered why the officer didn't send one of his own runners, but the officer wanted to conserve his own personnel, for he might have need of them later in the day. So Nell gathered himself together and when the little gun had dropped three shells, one after the other, at the mouth of the culvert he galloped across the ditch and dived into a shell hole on the far side. There he felt himself over to be sure he had not been hit.

panted a while until he got his breath back and then began to crawl from shell hole to shell hole, until he should come up with the infantry.

Nell had about a thousand yards to cover. This may not seem to be a very great distance, but when a man must make it on his stomach, crawling from shell hole to shell hole, and waiting in the bottom of each one until the fire lets up for a second or two, it takes an unbelievable length of time.

The infantry had made considerable advance. This the Germans discovered, stopped trying to prevent the crossing of troops along the river and concentrated their fire on the men in the field. The advance was supported locally by machine-gun, one-pounder and Stokes mortar, and the artillery still pounded the German positions.

However, the enemy had destroyed every bridge or makeshift as fast as it was put up, and bridge building had finally stopped, because there was no more material, nor were there any engineers to put it up if there had been. What few reserves had been left across the river had been forced to come over by wading, or by paddling themselves across on the wreckage of the bridges.

Nell had not gone very far before he found the backwash of the attack. First he came upon a machine-gun, set up and evidently in working order, but abandoned. Then he found rifles, blouses, rocket pistols, helmets, water-soaked gas-masks, a pair of field glasses with one side shot away, a broken stretcher. Scattered among the wreckage were the dead, a great many of them. They all had on their gas masks, and Nell wondered if they had been in the same hape as his.

He had got a bullet through the canister when the patrol had been shot up and his subsequent wading in the river had allowed the water to get in and make cake out of the contents, effectually closing the intake valve, so that when he had put on his mask he nearly smothered before he could get it off again.

There were occasional wounded in the shell holes, but they were unable to converse through their masks, even had they had the inclination.

"I'd better get a mask," thought Nell, "or I'll be ending my mission right here. I've got a hunch that all I'll get out of this wild rush to the front will be a pat on the back with a spade, but there's no use in bringing it on."

He looked around the field and sure enough saw a gas mask. A shell covered him with dirt, but he paid it no heed. He had ceased to notice either the shriek and clang of shells, or the whine and crack of bullets any more than a traveler on a train is conscious of the whir of the wheels beneath him.

Had he had more experience he would have known that a gas-mask that was thrown away must be useless, for it was the last thing a soldier would part with. This particular gas-mask was full of somebody's lunch.

Nell rolled sidewise into a shell hole. It was deeper and the side showed signs of having been squared with a shovel. Nell turned his head and discovered that there were several Germans in the hole, but they were harmless. They must have been a machine-gun crew, but their gun was gone. The men that had killed them had taken the gun along to use in the attack.

These Germans also had on masks. The German mask was made of leather, a cone-shaped affair, with a little gadget like the bottom part of a kerosene lantern at the point of the cone. This gadget contained the material that neutralized the gas. The apparatus was suspended from the wearer's face and not tied around his neck and behind his back as the American mask was.

It was therefore only necessary to remove the German's helmet to get his mask off. This Nell did. Gas is nothing to be squeamish with, and it is said of the British that they took more desperate measures than this in the early days when gas was first used and they had no masks to protect themselves against it.

A few holes beyond, Nell came on a trench mortar, which its crew were swabbing out.

"Where's the man in command of this shebeen?" cried Nell, lifting his mask.

The mortar gunners made gestures of ignorance with their hands. Nell thereupon went his way. He had instinctively clung to his rifle all this time, but his arm was at the point of falling off from fatigue and finally he let the rifle go. There were lots of them lying around and he could pick one up almost anywhere if he needed one.

Without his rifle he found he could roll like a barrel, which he did, and after exploring about six holes, found one where three men lay on gray blankets, looking over the edge from time to time. One of the men had field glasses and Nell addressed himself to him.

"Where's the major?" asked Nell.

"He's dead!" said the other, pulling the side of his mask away from his cheek and letting it snap back again.

"Who's in command?"

The officer pointed to himself. He had a first-lieutenant's bar on the cuff of his blouse.

"I've just come from the machine-gun company on the right," said Nell. "They've been cleaned out."

The officer nodded understandingly. Maybe he knew it anyway. "How are the one-pounders?" he asked.

"I took them up to the track to clean up some machine-guns," said Nell. "I left them at it and came up to report."

"Can you give us a hand here?" asked the officer.

Nell nodded.

The officer then slid over and hooking the rubber of his mask over Nell's ear, began to speak rapidly.

"I'm in command here. There's a company on the right that hasn't got any non-coms left even and I'm afraid they'll break. We've got the razor edge of a chance if we can once get the men to rush. If we get into the town we'll be safe from lots of things we aren't out here. They can send us over all kinds of supports after dark.

"I've been sending out runners to have all the machine-guns and trench mortars and everything in sight fire on the town steadily for twenty minutes, and then we'll get up and dash for it. It's three-thirty now. We can hang on for another hour and a half—few casualties if we don't try to advance—and at five o'clock over we go. Can you take 'em along?"

Nell nodded.

"What's your rank?" asked the officer. "You may be my senior for all I know."

NELL laughed in his mask and was about to assure the officer that he was only a private, when he suddenly changed his mind. His tailor-made uniform—was that it? No, sir. He remembered the machine-gun officer's field glasses. He had them still about his neck, the strap plainly visible, and the glasses in his gas-mask carrier, where the mask itself was carried when not being worn.

Nell's American mask had been hanging by its hose for some time. So the lieutenant thought Nell was an officer.

"So I am," said Nell to himself. "I'm just as good as one, maybe better. I used to be a sergeant of cavalry."

Therefore he nodded vigorously to the officer, shook his hand, and crawled off in the direction the officer had pointed out to him, where his new company lay. He began to find the shell holes full of wild-eyed infantry, some of whom fired at the houses in the town, and others sent rifle grenades tumbling.

Nell began to wonder how he would know where his bunch were. He rolled into a shell hole and found four men in it, eating sausage and cheese out of a German knapsack. Without further parley, one of the men offered Nell some and he, remembering that he had had no food since early morning, took some willingly.

One of the men suddenly removed a piece of sausage from his mouth, which he left open. He appeared to listen a moment and then suddenly turned on his knees and cautiously stuck his head over the side of the shell hole. Nell heard a clamor of voices, like the sound a crowd makes when the circus parade comes into view. The man on his knees jumped to his feet and tore off his gas-mask.

"Here comes our friends, gang!" he cried, and he began to fire his rifle as rapidly as he could.

The basis of the German tactical system has been, since the time of Frederick the Great, that of attack in mass. Their belie has been that while the mass attack provide for a short time a very large target, the effect of the mass on arriving at a thin firing-line will be irresistible. The system often works or it would not have been retained so long.

The mass relies mainly upon shock action for its effect, the same as charging cavalry do, and like charging cavalry, the mass fails before intrenched or unbroken infantry. However, when an enemy advance has proceeded some time, when the officers and non-commissioned officers have been killed off or wounded, when men are scattered here and there in shell holes, and the units of platoon, company, and battalion are all tangled up in each other, the opportune moment for the employment of shock action has arrived.

Nell poked his head over the edge of the shell hole. Oh man! There was a column of big husky Huns advancing at the gallop, so near that Nell could see their expressions. They looked mean. Their coal-scuttle helmets shadowed their faces and from under the vizors peered burning eyes, tight-lipped scowls and teeth skinned by blood-curdling grins.

These Boche were not tired looking, their uniforms were neither wet nor torn, they displayed intense eagerness to drink hot blood from Yankees' throats. Nell thought of a crowd he had once seen sweep off the center field bleachers and start for an umpire.

Pop bottles began to fly. They weren't really pop bottles, but stick grenades, as the sound soon told. Nell remembered that once upon a time a famous man had said that the Americans had no quarrel with the German people. Nell wished that man was there then to remind those Germans of that fact.

The Germans had come out from behind the town—there must have been a trench there—and were attacking the right of the American advance. Two-thirds of the Americans could not fire because their own men were between them and the Germans, and the Germans had foreseen that when the counter attack had been planned. They moved along rapidly.

Some Yanks stood up in the first bunch of shell holes and gave battle. The counter attack rolled over them without even hesitating, the Germans being very nearly fifty to one. The men in the next shell hole had their hands in the air when they stood up. They might just as well have put up a fight. Some of the Americans began to go away and Nell remembered that he had no rifle.

He looked to see if there were any on the ground, and discovered that he was alone, and the rush not ten feet away. Something struck him on the arm, numbing it. He thought at once that he had been hit, but on looking he saw a stick grenade still rolling in the bottom of the shell hole. Nell retired. A man that disputes the way with an express train is not called brave.

All along the line the Americans gave back. The men weren't panic-stricken, but they saw quite clearly that they were licked and there was no use staying there to be mopped up by those wild barbarians with their sawtoothed bayonets. It was lucky the Germans had no cavalry, thought Nell.

A cavalry charge at this time would have gone through and through the lines, lashed a retreat into a panicky rout, hurled these men back in a mob upon their machine-guns, and driven the remnants into the river to drown. Infantry, while they may achieve the same initial success as cavalry, can not exploit it, for they can not move any faster, or even as fast, as the men who are retreating.

NOW in back of the Yank advance had been machine-guns, one-pounders and mortars, using overhead fire. When the Americans reached these guns there was some effort made to stop them. There were non-coms and an officer or two there who made heroic efforts to get the men to turn. The American artillery, unaided by balloon or plane and firing blindly for the most part, had its own observers on the high ground across the river, and these had telephoned their guns the instant the rush began. It takes a minute or two to figure a little fire dope and change the sights, but now the enemy column was getting a flock of shells in its ranks. The machine-guns were pounding it with a will and its formation began to have cracks in it.

Panic is much like a fire in dry leaves. It starts from very little, but it doesn't take long to spread and the farther it goes, the worse it gets. Nell tried hard to keep his head, but every time he looked around he saw men going, and when he got to the machine-gun line, he could see two or three guns already abandoned.

It looked as if all the ground that had been taken with so much trouble, and that had cost so many lives, was going to be lost. The Germans were advancing from right to left of the Americans, their idea being to roll up the flank and drive the Yanks out of their positions so near the town. Hence Nell, who had run parallel with the river, had got some distance from the boche. He jumped into a shell hole to catch his breath, and removed his mask to breathe easier.

"Got a letter for me?" said a voice.

Nell turned. Behold the high cheekbones and lantern jaw of the hard-boiled man.

"What do you mean, letter?" asked Nell, hoping the other had not seen him running.

"You look like you was carryin' the mail," said the hard-boiled man.

"I'm looking for a rifle," said Nell weakly.

"Huh!" grunted the other. "There's plenty round."

"Show me one," said Nell, "and I'll go back and lick those Boche single handed."

"I got a Luger you can have," said the other, tendering Nell a German pistol.

"That's no good," said Nell. "You can't do any good with that."

"Maybe you could scare 'em with it," suggested the hard-boiled man.

"Those birds aren't so wise now," remarked Nell, taking another peek out of the hole.

The Germans were being heavily punished by the American artillery and the machine-guns across the river. Some ran about in confusion and others were jumping into shell holes and getting under cover. The other man stuck his head up.

"Right now," said he, "would be the time to go to give them guys a good swift kick in the nose. Let's you an' me get some kind of a gang an' go do it."

A third man, wearing a mask, arrived in the shell hole with a rush. He turned the goggling eye-pieces upon each of the men, then he seized Nell's arm.

"You're just the man I'm looking for!" he rumbled faintly. "What are you doing here?"

"We were just planning a counter attack," said Nell.

The third man removed his mask, revealing the features of the lieutenant who had thought Nell was an officer, and sniffed.

"Guess I can take a chance for a minute," he said. "Those Boche have been shaken up by our artillery and what few guns I've still got in the field here. Their officers are getting them together for another rush. They've been firing rockets for the last ten minutes. If we can get these men to follow us, I think we could do something, but we've got to do it quick! You take the left and I'll take the right!"

He looked at his wrist watch.

"Can you get them ready in five minutes? Try it. When I blow the whistle, let's get up and get at 'em. And if we don't bust up this attack we're done!"

He put his mask on again and was gone.

"We'd better start," said the hard-boiled man. "Five minutes ain't much to warm up the feet o' this gang."

"Think we ought to put on our masks?" asked Nell.

"I ain't goin' to put on mine," said the other. "I got a cold an' I've heard gas was good for it."

The two started for the next shell hole. It was empty, but the one beyond held five men.

"We ain't got no ammunition," said they in response to Nell's announcement that a counter attack would start in five minutes.

"You won't need any," said Nell. "A bayonet will do. Remember the only chance we got is to get into that town. They'll wreck us if we try to cross the river again!"

The next shell hole received the news in silence. There were two men in it. Between that shell hole and the next, out of which stuck the muzzle of a machine-gun, some one threw a handful of gravel at the two men, at least that was what it felt like. Little bits of dirt stung their faces. The two men went into the hole like frogs into water.

"Machine-gun," said Nell.

"They seen us," agreed the hard-boiled man.

Some pieces of grass blew along. The gun was still going, and it was very clear that the organizers of the counter attack would go no farther. They inspected the shell hole into which they had leaped.

There was a machine-gun in it, standing above a great pile of empty clips. There was a handful of rifle shells, a first-aid packet ripped open and empty, and a canteen, also empty. Here was evidence of the desperate state of the Americans. An advancing battalion with a river at its back is liable to run short of ammunition. A rifleman can burn up a tremendous amount of cartridges, upward of four or five hundred rounds in a day, provided he can get it. The ammunition pockets in his belt will hold only a certain amount, and the amount that can be carried in bandoliers is limited.

In the shank of the day the dead and wounded do not yield very much ammunition, having been shooting all day themselves. A machine-gun is in the same fix as a rifle, only more so, because of its greater rapidity of fire.

The men of Nell's battalion had been without sleep for two nights, and had been fighting hard since daybreak. A soldier gets tired as well as any other man. Their wet clothes were uncomfortable, and they had drunk up all their water. The Boche had given them a rub a few minutes ago, but they were too tired to run very far. Hence they stayed in the shell holes into which they had fled. The next shove, the enemy would carry them to the river, and that would end the battalion.

Nell had a pull at his canteen. There was just a trickle of water left in it.

"——," he muttered, "I don't remember drinking all that water!"

It was gone, though, and he thought that the rest of the outfit must be just as dry as he.

"What'll we do now?" he asked his companion.

"We can stay in the hole," said the hard-boiled man, "an' get killed when the Boche jump us, or we can go along tellin' these guys that there's a party bein' planned, and be killed right now."

"I know something better than that," said Nell. "Let's yell and tell 'em to pass it along!"

"Try it!"

Nell cupped his hands around his mouth and yelled:

"Counter attack in five minutes! Pass it along!"

He listened to see if any one repeated what he said. No sound, save the faint yelling of the Boche non-coms, distant shells grunting, and the yapping of guns in the town. He called again, without success.

"You an' me yell together," he said to the hard-boiled man, so they both yelled and this time, like an echo, they heard someone call:

"Counter attack in five minutes! Pass it along!"

The two listened to hear it passed, but they were disappointed.

"Let's yell again," suggested Nell and took a deep breath.

Wheeeee! Wheeeee!

"The whistle!" gasped Nell.

Then he and the hard-boiled man jumped to their feet and went out of the shell hole.

"Come on!" they cried. "Let's go! Everybody up! Come outta your hole!"

THERE was about as much enthusiasm as there would have been at a temperance meeting with these same soldiers being exhorted to step up and sign the pledge. There are about a thousand men in a battalion and there should have been between three and four hundred of them left to spring to their feet with a ringing cheer, but after fourteen hours of fighting, a man neither springs nor cheers.

Nell's startled eye saw that not over fifteen men were following him and the hard-boiled man, and that on the left where the officer was supposed to be, there was no one. A man jumped from shell hole to shell hole, blowing a whistle, and they could see his foot swinging, but a kick in the stern is not half so bad as a machine-gun bullet in the bow, and the men refused to come out.

"It's too late to go back now," thought Nell, "we're as dead as geese!"

He continued to run forward. A German stood up and aimed a pistol at him. Nell threw up his hand and discovered that he had in it a machine-gun ammunition carrier, a large thin box. Where had he picked that up?

He forgot the German and looked about for a rifle. No sign of one. Behind him he heard grunts. His supporters were doing up the Germans. Nell's breath came pantingly now. Where were those —— Boche? He dodged between shell holes and jumped over bodies. What would he do without a rifle when he reached the enemy?

He had not made up his mind when he reached them, and so there was nothing to do but to shatter the ammunition box over the head of one man and drive his fist into another man's nose. Then the third, fourth and fifth men went down in a heap with Nell on the bottom. It did not seem that he had hit the ground before he was up again and unencumbered. His twenty men were still with him and they had all jumped into that same shell hole.

"Out we go," cried the hard-boiled man, and away they went.

There is this disadvantage to a terrain full of shell holes. A force gets into them, and the tendency is to keep the head down. thus preventing the reception of signals or commands. Such a condition is at its worst among a soldiery like the German army, where the individual is not supposed to do any thinking for himself.

Nell had armed himself with a German rifle and had led his devoted band some ten yards into the German line, skewering with a will, before any notice was taken of a counter attack. The machine-gunners in the town knew of it, all right, and must have made the air black with harsh words, but they could not fire without endangering their own men. The twenty kept on. They made astonishing progress, for the Germans were still disorganized, and the shouts of their officers did not convey any meaning to them except that efforts at further progress to the front were going to be made.

When they caught the words "Americans," "Counter attack," and heard excited voices, they attributed it all to the aforesaid efforts at reorganization. Thus the Americans found many of the enemy still lying flat in their shell holes.

However, the noise and shouts in German continued, and when it finally dawned on the Germans that their enemies were running wild in the shell holes, they arose and began to show signs of fight. The American machine-guns, what few had any ammunition left, began to take toll of some, but the rest pulled the strings out of their grenades, and having hurled them bore down upon the twenty Americans, whose number was reduced to six in as little time as it takes to tell it.

Nell smote a helmet that proved to be empty, stung his hands and broke his rifle. Then, looking frantically about for another rifle, he saw a machine-gun, a German, two of its crew dead, and the rest running as fast as possible toward a group of Germans who were getting ready to throw grenades.

"Git out the way!" cried Nell and hurled himself at the gun.

His fingers seized the handles and his thumbs fell naturally into place on the thumb-pieces. The gun began to fire before Nell knew how he had started it. It jumped and wiggled like an eel. The vibration was terrible. Nell sent a burst into the ground that threw up a cloud of grass and stones; he leaned back and sent one into air that probably went across the river and landed among the guns on the narrow-gage track, and the third he got into a line of Boche that were running toward him with very threatening looks.

"Wow!" howled Nell as the line disappeared.

He saw another group to the right and swung his gun at them, expecting them to go down like grass before the scythe. They did not mind a bit, but continued to advance, some firing their rifles, and some preparing grenades.

It is quite a stunt to shoot a heavy machine-gun and do it right, because the force of the machinery working has a very distracting effect on the aim, and Nell never having fired a machine-gun in his life, knew nothing about resting his elbows on his knees, or pulling down hard on the handles, or any of the other ways of controlling the gun's actions.

"Cut out shootin' that —— gun," cried a voice in his ear. "Here come our guys and some of 'em might get hurted."

Nell twisted his head and beheld the hard-boiled man, who pointed to a line of trotting Yanks. They had heard the yelling of the Boche, and poking up their heads in expectation of attack, had discovered the thin brown line of Yanks leaping about and poking their bayonets at Hunnish stomachs.

Some of the Yanks came out and began to run toward the fight. More followed. The lieutenant took heart again and urged with foot and voice. An advance is just as contagious as a retreat, once it gets started in good shape. More men sprang up, and hurried along. They were as eager now to close with the enemy as they had been to stay in their holes a few minutes before. The Germans began to give back.

"Don't bother me," cried Nell, "get away from the front of this gun! I got work to do."

He turned the muzzle on some Boche who were moving a gun to a better hole. Out of the fifty or sixty shots that he threw at them, one took effect, upon the man who was carrying the tripod. The man let go his hold, the tripod fell on the foot of one of the men with the gun, who in turn let go the gun and seized his foot.

The rest of the crew dropped what they were carrying and took wings. Nell sent some more bullets into the ground and begant to feel fatigue in his arms. The gun coughed and was silent. Nell pushed on the thumb piece, but nothing happened. He pounded the breech, as he had seen gunners do when there was a jam, but the gun made no response.

"It won't shoot unless it has bullets," said a man. "Put in another belt."

THE man ran by about his business. A German appeared from somewhere, a black-faced man with a three days' growth of beard, and a little round cap around his ears. He engaged in a bicker with a Yank, and proved to be the better man. Then he advanced on Nell. Nell decided to go elsewhere, and raised a little cloud of dust doing it.

"Hey, wait for me," called the hard-boiled man, and pausing to shoot the black-faced German, he followed Nell.

"You better get a rifle," he panted, in Nell's ear, when he had caught up with him. "You hadn't ought to be chasin' around without one. If one o' these birds happens to get mad at you, you want to have somethin' to talk back with. Here's a good hole, let's catch our breath!"

"No," cried Nell. "Don't let this gang get stopped again. We've got these jerries worried, let's shove 'em good. If we once get into the town we can hold it till —— goes out. Follow me!" he cried, as loudly as he could for his dry throat. "Follow me!"

Some near at hand heard and echoed his shout.

"Keep goin'!" they called. "Into the town!"

Some followed Nell, some stayed behind to finish what they were doing. Still others could not advance because the enemy in front outnumbered them.

The contending forces swayed back and forth a few seconds like wrestlers before a fall. In pitched fights like this, but one force can be victor, there is no halfway decision possible, and the side that has the most determination wins. The Americans, after having been pounded since daylight by bullet, grenade and shell, ducked in the river, and burned by the sun in the fields, once thrown back and almost routed, were at last at hand grips with their enemy, within reach of the town and victory and they would not be denied.

They gave a solemn shout, more a croak than a cheer, and every man calling up his last strength, fired his last cartridge, hurled his last grenade, and rushed forward with the bayonet.

The Germans recoiled, gave ground, turned, broke, and scattered in wild flight. The Americans followed and a fearful snarling crowd of both armies swept into the town, and jammed in the narrow streets, continued the battle there. Germans poured from door, window and cellar entrance. Some fought. Others surrendered and a —— of a lot of good it did them.

Nell pursued a German that ran before him. This German had a rifle and Nell wanted it. At his side galloped the hard-boiled man, whooping. The two of them caught up with the German and leaped upon his back. When Nell arose he had the rifle and was looking into the business end of several more that protruded from a door.

"Git 'em!" he croaked, and only hoping that he would reach one before he was killed, he lunged forward.

He knew the rifles went off, for he felt the blast of their discharge, then he was through the door and shoving an impaled German against the wall. A table went over, and a man tripped in its cloth and went headlong into a cupboard full of pans that clanked dolefully. A flower pot on a window sill jumped a little, and dissolved into dirt and fragments.

If there is in hell any such turmoil and noise as there was in that narrow street, then it must be hell indeed.

There was the continuous explosion of grenades, the crash of shells and the wild yells, now distant, now under the very windows, of men gone back to their first beginnings and clawing at each other's throat. There was no rifle shooting, the Americans wanted to feel their antagonists under their blows. Butts, bayonets and naked hands were the things.

There was a sound of pounding feet. Some Yanks had just crowded in the door, but finding no one but two of their own men went out again. Nell jerked his blouse from the locked fingers of the men he had fought with and got up. Where was the hard-boiled man? The house shook as though it were built on the side of a track and a train going by. Bits of plaster and little clouds of dust filled the air. The trembling of the house and the rattling noise continued.

"There's a gun upstairs!" shrieked Nell.

The hard-boiled man was by the fireplace tugging at the overturned table. Nell, without knowing why, helped him to right it, and shove it out into the room, close to the front wall. The hard-boiled man leaped upon it, and clutching his rifle, crouched, and then with a gasping effort, shoved upward with his bayonet through the ceiling. There was a shriek that all the clamor in the street could not drown.

The hard-boiled man leaped in air and clung to his rifle like an ape, but the bayonet was wedged too tightly in plank and lath—and something else—and would not come out. The trembling stopped and the hard-boiled man let go his rifle and dropped to the table.

"The gun! They'll fire through the ceiling!" he cried to Nell.

With the words there was a roar, plaster flew down, and a cloud of dust leaped upward from the floor. The hard-boiled man gave a leap and dived through a window by the fireplace, taking sash and broken glass with him. Nell went through the back of the house, where a shell had broken in the wall.

He was in a garden, a tiny enclosure with well kept rows of vegetables. The Boche had been caring for that garden all summer. The noise from the street came faintly here, but beyond the next row of houses men ran hither and yon, and smoke rose above the roofs.

"Gee, it's dark," said Nell. "It must be late."

He was surprized that the twilight had come so soon. He looked up at the sky to assure himself that the sun was really setting and that it was not his imagination that made the air so gloomy. The high white clouds were pink and their edges blue with shadow.

A great black shape passed swiftly overhead, just above the trees. Two more followed, and then three. Nell crouched against the wall of the house. On the wide-flung wings of those fearful things he had seen the thin arms of a cross and knew the enemy airplane, although he had never seen one before.

CRASH! Nell's wits were some time in returning after the heavens had fallen that way, and when they did, he found he had turned and run back between the houses almost to the street by which he had first entered the town. The dead lay in that street like leaves, and white-faced men, German and American, fled together under the trees.

Another bomb, and a house crumpled in upon itself like a structure of cards. Nell turned away. There was a German machine-gun crew lying in a heap on their overturned gun, almost at his feet, and among them was the hard-boiled man, one hand grasping the hilt of a hidden trench knife and the other upon the handle of the gun. Bombs rained down, one on the heels of another, on Boche and Yank alike, but Nell waited.

His rifle was gone long ago, and he was unarmed, but he wanted to make sure he could not help his comrade. It was impossible. The other had been shot through and through by the machine-gun in the room above, but yet had taken toll of the gun crew outside the window before he died, as he had lived, a hard-boiled man.

And the rest of the gun crew must have been dead when he had leaped on them, or had been killed soon after, for he lay as he had come from the window.

Nell found himself running, as does a man in a dream. Four Germans passed him within arms' length, and though they saw him clearly, they made no sign, but kept on their way. Nell ran along, going sometimes through one wall and then the other of a shattered house, skipping over shattered limbs of trees, going through the gate of a barbed-wire barricade, a gate with the saw-buck affair that closed it, swung wide as it had been to let the retreating Germans through.

He came at last to a great wide street, silent and deserted. He ran down this, paying no heed to distant firing, nor the sounds of men running by him in the darkness. When the street ended at the river, he stopped, but seeing the fragments of the shattered bridge below him, he jumped down with the courage of desperation, and slipping and sliding from one block of cement to the other, got across to where some machine-gunners on the other side helped him to shore and gave him a blanket to put over his head, and in which he might stifle his sobs.

There was a fearful calm along the river now. The machine-gunners whispered among themselves, but their gun was silent. No lights went up when darkness fell, for the enemy knew there would be no more attempts on the town that night. The corporal of the gun-squad finally detailed two men for duty with the gun, and he and two others crawled into the hole where Nell lay, and prepared to sleep.

"Better take a little rest," said the

corporal to Nell. "You may need it."

"I suppose we'll try our luck again in the morning," said Nell.

"Not a chance," said the other man. "There ain't enough of this division left to take a machine-gun nest. I got just one clip for this gun an' I'm savin' it for any jerry that tried to come across the same way you did."

Nell had thought that he could not sleep, but he did at last, and had no sooner closed his eyes than a man shook him violently by the shoulder.

"I will tell you that this man is dead," said a far-away voice. "I'm all tuckered out shakin' at him. I'm fer lettin' him lie."

"I'm awake," said Nell. "What the —— do you want?"

"Git up," said another man. "Stir yourself, we got to be on our way."

Nell struggled to his feet. The night was black and a gentle rain soaked everything it touched.

"Where's the man that said we wouldn't take another crack at the town?" groaned Nell.

"We ain't takin' no cracks at no one," said the man who had awakened Nell. "We're bein' relieved. Come on, let's get outta here."

"Relieved?" cried Nell. "That may do for you, but I'm no machine-gunner. How do I know my outfit's being relieved?"

"Aw, the whole —— division's bein' relieved," said the other. "Whaddyuh think, we can stand this kind of a racket forever? Ever play freeze-out? Well, we been playin' freeze-out with the Boche, all our chips is gone an' some one else is gonna sit in."

A harsh whisper echoed from the darkness.

"Now sergeant, don't go hectorin' me about no spare barrel. The only thought I hev got is to get out uv range. I hev been a good soldier and done as you said whenever you spoke, but if you go botherin' an' naggin' at me now, when I hain't had no sleep fer a week, I'll git into a state uv mind, now you better believe."

Some one barked a command for silence. The machine-gunners began to move off and some one else tugged at Nell's sleeve. He followed. There was a tremendous number of men moving in the darkness and when they came out on the road and had marched some distance, they found it filled with machine-gun carts, ammunition carts and infantry standing about in slickers. Nell and his comrades increased their pace. He had no idea of how many there were with him, but from the sound there must be quite a column. They marched as fast as they could, chafed and swore in the halts, and swore roundly whenever trucks got in the way.

"Think we're outta range yet?" they muttered.

Day found them still on the road, wet and shivering, for very few of them had any slickers. Nell could now see that his machine-gunners had indeed joined a column, the remnants of the division, men wild eyed, bearded and haggard, their clothing torn, their equipment gone, and their one thought to put as much ground between them and the enemy as they could, while they were able to move one foot after the other. Every time they thought they were safely away, they would pass a great caterpillar gun, or see the green netting that covered a battery of snake-necked heavies, and know that they still were within reach of enemy shells.

The column at last turned into some woods and the order being given to fall out, the men fell out and down, under the first wet bush they saw, and slept heavily. They slept until late in the afternoon and then began to arise and clamor for food.

While supper and dinner combined was being served, men circulated through the woods, calling for members of the different units and telling them where to report to join their own organization. Infantry, machine-gunners and signal corps men were all mixed up with each other, and it would be a difficult job to unscramble them again.

The first battalion, to which Nell belonged, was in a farm a few hundred yards down the road. Nell went there, sadly enough, thinking of the men of his squad, and of what had happened to them. The man that had died the first day in the woods, Spagett and the corporal in the ditch, Goodrich, Nell's captain, the hard-boiled man. Nell entered the farm and the first man he saw was one who sat under a shed, bending over a brass 75 shell.

"Do I know you?" asked Nell.

The other man looked up. It was Curran.

"Well, hullo!" he cried. "So they didn't get you either. I seen you runnin' around like a crazy man. Boy, I guess you an' me are the sole survivors of our old gang.

Golly! All them guys gone, just for a little town, an' then we didn't get it after all!"

"When did they bump off the captain?" asked Nell.

"Why, they got him when we first started out. Some guys were going to carry him out, but he says to leave him in a shell hole. So they left him. An' he props himself up on a jerry knapsack an' hollers, 'You ——, don't let me see you runnin' away! You may think I'm out of it, but if any man starts to beat it he'll find he's mistaken.' I don't know what happened to him after that, because things got warm, but he stopped hollerin' after a while, an' I guess they croaked him."

"I see you managed to save your vase after all?"

"Now ain't that ——," cried Curran. "After all that trouble I took and bringin' it safe in an' everythin', an' then last night some great big mule-footed jughead goes an' tramps on it. I think I can fix it, though," he continued, bending over the shell solicitously. "I c'n put a block or somethin' in there an' maybe pound the dent out of it that way."

A man came out of one of the doors about the farm yard and was going out the gate when he noticed Nell. He stopped and looked again, and then came over to him.

"I've been wondering about you," said the man. "I was beginning to be afraid that the boche had gotten you after all."

It was the lieutenant that had led the last dash into the town.

"I guess they didn't get me, sir," said Nell, grinning, "although I thought they were going to once or twice in that town."

"How did your outfit make out?" asked the lieutenant.

"I guess they're pretty well shot. I was just talking with Curran here about the captain."

"Why, this man's in my battalion," said the officer in perplexity.

"So am I," said Nell. "I'm out of G Company."

"Out of G Company," cried the officer, "why I thought I knew all the lieutenants in that company. Let's see, there's Noble and Trelawney, and——"

"I'm not an officer," said Nell, sorely embarrassed. "I'm just a buck private."

The officer was speechless.

"You're just a private!" he gasped.

"That's all," said Nell.

"An' he's a John, too," spoke up Curran. "He just joined the night we went up."

The officer's mouth shut like a trap.

"Come with me!" said he, and seizing Nell's arm, rushed him through the little door into the farmhouse.

There was a table in there, and a lot of maps and papers, and a mob of officers sitting and standing. The division commander was making the rounds, and this was the P. C. of Nell's regiment.

The lieutenant shoved his way to the table and saluted the white-mustached man with the gold and the two stars on his overseas cap that sat there.

"General," said he, "you'll pardon me for interruption, but I have just found the officer I was telling you about. He's the man that led the counter attack and saved us all from being wiped out. He isn't an officer, he's just a private, but he ought to be one, and so I'm going to recommend him for a commission for gallantry in action!"

The general bent a lowering gaze on Nell.

"*Hurrumph!*" said he. "Write me a letter about it, put your recommendation through channels, and we'll see about it."

Then he proceeded with his inspection of a pile of papers.

"Meanwhile," said the lieutenant, as they went out, "I'm in command of the battalion. We won't have any officer replacements until tomorrow, when we get to the railhead, so you'll command G Company. There are some corporals that you'll rank, but you needn't mind that. Have your company on the road by seven o'clock."

NELL had no trouble with his company. There weren't many more men there than he had had in his platoon in the old regiment. A war strength company goes into action with about two hundred and forty men and Nell had forty-eight survivors to command. The men accepted him without question. His uniform was creased and dirty, but still it was plainly tailor-made and Nell's appearance and actions were such as to command respect.

"Who the —— is that guy?" asked some.

"He's the guy that brung back the patrol," said others, or "He's the guy that led the counter attack when we was gettin' ready to pull outta the wheat," or "If it hadn't a been for him there wouldn't none of us got out of that field."

So throughout the night he led them and no one fell out, and no one tried to hop a ride on a truck, and when at the end of the march, Nell led his forty-eight into a barn and put them to sleep in the hay without waiting to get permission to do so, they profanely allowed that he was the best —— officer they had ever met in all their travels.

Nell had marched in a daze all night. A commission for gallantry! That was quite a thing. He didn't know yet how he liked it. It was like taking strange liquor; one had to wait until the kick came before giving a decision on it.

"I ain't half as thrilled as I ought to be," decided Nell.

He was still thinking about it as he made up his bed in a horse stall. He had acquired some blankets and an overcoat from a salvage pile and these were his coverings. There was a little window by the stall and Nell looked out of it for a minute.

"Huh!" he grunted in surprize.

There was a clattering of hoofs on a distant road, and then the soft *thud, thud* of them on grass. There was no moon, but the stars were out and Nell could see a thick clump of moving objects, too tall for infantry, and too close together for artillery, going across the field behind the barn.

There was a succession of mournful crys and the mass halted. There was a rustle of movement, and then a confusion of soft sound. Men called to each other, commands rang out, there was the sound of hammering on wood.

"Yessir," cried Nell, "that's an outfit of cavalry and they're puttin' up a picket line. I'll go look at 'em in the morning."

Bugles awakened Nell, but he found they were not the bugles of his regiment. The infantry were allowed to sleep late and it was scarcely daylight, the cool of a late-summer morning, with birds singing in the trees, old French women driving cows to pasture, and a bright blue sky overhead.

Nell put on his shoes, anyway, for he wanted to see what outfit that cavalry belonged to, and it would be an hour before his company would be turned out for reveille. Down behind the barn he went. There was cavalry and no mistake, with two long picket lines, the horses stamping and kicking, their tails waving, and the air full of hay that was being tossed down for their breakfast.

The picket guard were putting on nose bags and the horses nickered eagerly, and squealed and bit at each other, in their impatience. A man sang, heaving forkfuls of hay into the air:

"Curry-comb and brush in the off-side pocket,
On the nigh side picket pin an' line.
If your horse won't go for the proddin' of the spur,
Then you'll have to mix him up some turpentine."

Nell choked. That song was one of his favorites. The smell of hay was in his nostrils and the smell of leather, and of horse, and of bacon frying, and no old cavalryman can stand the combination dry-eyed.

"Hey, Jerry!" called some one. "Them hard-tails o' yours been fed yet? Better get a move on."

Nell's ears began to sing and his heart expanded so that it was difficult to breathe. He picked up a nose bag and examined it, though the picket guard eyed him suspiciously. On the bottom of it was stenciled a pair of crossed sabres, with the number 18 above, and the letter B below.

Nell took a deep breath. This was his old regiment, and if this picket line was B troop's, the next must be A, and that was Sergeant Olsen calling to Jerry Daffinee, the wagon driver. Nell would have known his voice had he heard it among those of the entire regiment.

He went between two horses—old friends, too, "68" and "Toodles," which last snapped his teeth at Nell's arm and then flung his head high to escape the well-merited slap that he feared was coming. But Nell did not slap him. He was looking for his buddy.

"Oley!" he called.

The sergeant at the other end of the picket line nearly leaped out of his clothes and then made another leap that carried him to Nell.

"What the —— are you doin' here?" cried Oley.

"I'm with a doughboy outfit in the barn there. We just come off the front."

"I'll say you did. Why don't you shave?"

"Never mind the shave, I've been workin'," grinned Nell. "Where's this gang of jaspers going?"

"Up to the front," said Oley, "just A and B troops. The Old Man's in command."

"Up to the front," cried Nell, "why when did that happen?"

"We got the order about two days after you was gone. We got off the train at Chatter Theery last night. I told you you ought to stuck around. Why there was rumors about our goin' before you had your brain-storm even."

"What did the Old Man say when he came back and found me gone?"

To this sergeant Olsen did not reply, but inhaled his breath slightly, as his eye wandered over Nell's shoulder.

"I said you were a —— fool!" said a voice.

Nell swung about and beheld his former troop commander.

"What the —— was the matter with you, Colburn?" asked the captain. "Don't you know you might have been hung for taking that German out with you? And why didn't you wait until I came back before you pulled out of camp that way?"

"I couldn't, sir. They shoved me in with that replacement outfit and away we went. I just had time to get a pack carrier and a new rifle."

"Well, did you get up to the front?"

"I'll say I did," said Nell.

"Are you satisfied?" asked the captain.

"I'll say I am."

The captain turned to Sergeant Olsen. "How many spare horses have we?"

"Seven, sir," said the sergeant.

"How about equipment?"

"Well, Terrio will have to turn in his, he's going to hospital this morning."

"We ought to have a man to ride one of those horses."

The captain looked at Nell and then walked away. The sergeant nudged his former comrade in the ribs.

"Yuh on, kid, yuh on?" he grinned.

"It appears to me," said Nell soberly, "that the old man is incitin' me to desert my outfit."

"Desert ——! This is your outfit. Come on eat; breakfast is ready."

NELL thought a moment. He had another hour before his company would be up. He might as well eat with the boys, anyway. He went up to the kitchen and a reception was staged that was a bit uproarious. The stable sergeant would not allow Nell to eat a mouthful until he had taken him back to the line and showed him his horse.

The top-sergeant tried to pump Nell about the front, but on that subject Nell was as silent as a clam. After breakfast Nell went back to the picket line and leaned against the escort wagon, while he and Sergeant Olsen changed some Bull Durham into smoke.

"Goin' with us?" asked the sergeant.

"I'm afraid not," said Nell, "I'm afraid not. I got a company over there I got to take care of."

"A company!"

"Yup, a company. They made me a looey for some crazy stuff I did up on the lines."

"Did they make yuh, or did they recommend yuh to be made?" asked the sergeant looking meaningly at Nell.

"They recommended me," said Nell.

"Oh," said the sergeant.

Nell thought on that for a while. It was one thing to be recommended and another thing to be approved. Still, it was worth waiting to find out about.

"Well," continued the sergeant, "I suppose that was what you had in mind when you got so all-fired eager to go up to the front."

"That's whatever," agreed Nell.

"What?" shrieked the sergeant. "How come?"

"Do you mind that letter I got from young Duff, that got sent to officers trainin' camp with me and got commissioned? Well, he's a first lieutenant now, and if I couldn't be a better soldier than he is, I'd put in for a transfer to the medical corps. And bein' filled up with the swill the papers pass out, I thought the war was about over an' if I was goin' to get a commission, I'd better get after it. It was too late to go to a trainin' camp, so the only way I knew of was to get one for gallantry. Well, to tell you the truth, I forgot all about it after a while, but I got it just the same."

"Nell Colburn," said the sergeant, aghast, "I always said that you wasn't right in the head. What the ——'s a commission in the doughboys?"

In B troop, the man who had sung when he put out the hay was still singing as he took off the nose bags and piled them where their owners could get them.

"I'd rather be a woodshed in my father's back yard,
Than be a first lootenant in the national guard.
Oh, tell me how long must I hes-o-tate,
Can I have you now, or have I got to wait?"

"Sounds reasonable," remarked the sergeant.

"Who's been ridin' my horse?" asked Nell suddenly.

"One o' the Johns," said the sergeant. "He don't take no kind o' care o' him."

"He ought to be tried!" said Nell.

The head of a column appeared at the upper end of the picket line. It was the troop marching down to saddle up. The sergeant moved away to attend to the saddling of his own mount. He gave some direction to one of the men, who, gathering his saddle again, followed the sergeant to a different part of the line. The troop saddled and led out.

Nell watched them with an aching heart. There were several things he would have liked to correct—blankets on wrong side to, bits too far down in the mouth, stirrups too short. He remembered his ignorance of infantry tactics, that he did not even know how a grenade was fired.

"This is the outfit I belong in," said Nell to himself. "I know something about cavalry and all I know about infantry is that it gets an awful rub when there's any fightin' to do."

Still, a commission was a commission. But what would he buy an outfit with?

"All I need is a Sam Brown belt and a pair o' pins," he thought.

"Good-by, Nell," said the sergeant.

He had mounted and ridden up unnoticed. He bent down from the saddle and shook hands. A whistle blew and Nell could hear the trampling as the troops moved out. Well, a commission in the infantry was better than a buck private even in the cavalry.

"So long," said Nell, and started back to his barn.

There were whistles blowing in the town now and it was time the company was out of the hay. He turned for one last look at the cavalry. B Troop was leading, then A, then the escort wagons, their khaki tops swaying over the uneven ground. There was a knot of horsemen by the last wagon, evidently a rear guard. Then Nell discovered that there was a horse tethered to a tree, and left alone in the field.

"Hey!" called Nell. "Look at that horse. Hey, you left a horse."

The horse, watching the departing troops, ran first one way about the tree and then the other, and finally nickered plaintively. Nell stopped. That horse looked like the one he used to ride.

"He never had that nickerin' habit when he was mine," said Nell. "I better untie him an' let him run, he'll catch up with 'em."

He ran back to the tree and undid the halter shank, muttering his thought of the man that would tie up a horse and then go off and leave him.

"Beat it," said Nell, waving his hand.

The horse, however, did not run, but came close to Nell and sniffed at the pocket where Nell used to carry his tobacco.

"You knew me, didn't you?" said Nell. "You old crow bait, you cheat the sausage-maker every day of your life. If I had a cigaret I'd give it to you. Beat it now."

He turned the horse's head in the direction the troops had gone, but the horse turned back. This wasn't the first time he and this man had been left when the others went away. The horse knew. This was to be a patrol, an outpost, or a picket, and after a while there would be a lot of fine galloping, with sugar and tobacco after it was over. The horse wasn't to be fooled. There! He knew it! The man had got into saddle. Now for a good gallop.

WHEN Nell came sliding up to the rear guard, he discovered it was composed of the first sergeant, the stable sergeant and Sergeant Olsen.

"There," said Olsen, "didn't I tell yuh if I tied that old goat out there he'd have to come in. Make up your mind, Nell?"

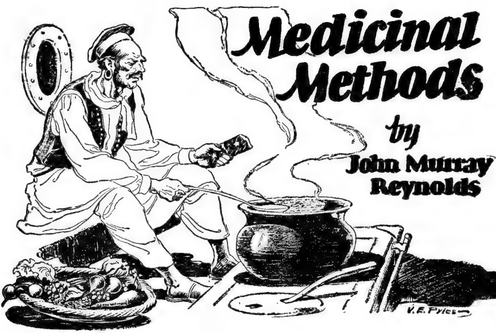
"Sure," said Nell, "a buck private of cavalry's got 'em all beat, clear up to general."

"All right, *privit!*" grinned the top sergeant, "bein' as how you was late to formation, you c'n ride back here with us all day an' eat dust."

Thereat there was great slapping of backs and striking of hands, and the rearguard rode forward very merrily.

Medicinal Methods

by John Murray Reynolds



THE northeast trade blew strong and steady, blowing from the anchorage in the lee of Cayo Ingles directly toward the mainland. This latter was the north coast of Cuba; the anchorage of Cayo Ingles lying eighteen miles out from the seaport of Caimanítas, eighteen miles alike as the barracuda swims or the cargo lighters sail. There is no nearer anchorage or harbor suitable for vessels of any size, wherefore all cargo coming into Caimanítas must be lightered in over that eighteen mile haul, and all export sugar must be lightered out.

This constitutes one of the many reasons why the manager of the Caribbean Line's branch office in Caimanítas must be a man of resource if he would hold his job.

At this particular time the freighters *Carib Prince* and *Carib Chieftan* were the sole occupants of the anchorage; the former loading sugar and the latter discharging general cargo. Early in the afternoon the last sling-loads of flour came out of the hold of the latter ship, and the two lighters lying alongside prepared to start for shore. The gangs of stevedores boarded the launch which chugged away toward the mainland. There was no tug in sight, but the steamer was ready to sail, so the two lighters, each manned by a *patron* and four *marineros*, cut loose from the *Carib Chieftan*. The weather being favorable the absence of the tug made little difference, as the lighters rigged up big square tarpaulins as sails and turned their blunt noses toward shore.

At dusk the lighter *Josefita* had drawn a little ahead of her consort and was nearing the maze of small docks and warehouses that constitute the Caimanítas waterfront. In the dim light she resembled a viking ship with her great square sail; the heads of a row of petroleum drums lying on their sides completing the illusion by representing the row of Bersark's shields along the seafarer's rail.

Pancho Urrutia was newly become *patron* of the *Josefita* this past week, and his dignity sat heavy upon him. He took his plate of *tortilla* and fried plantains a little apart from the others, as befitted one in authority. It seemed that the four *marineros* under his command did not take this in the right spirit.

"Is it that the deck is softer over there, Panchito *mio?*" inquired one Luis Raola.

This Luis was an insolent fellow with no sense of the fitness of things but Pancho dare not ask that he be discharged, for was he not a third cousin of Señora Urrutia's own mother? Pancho strove to think of the things his wife would say at such an affront to one of her kin, but abandoned the task as being beyond him. He allowed the remark of Luis to pass unnoticed, as one ignores the babbling of a child.

Alfredo Moreno looked up from the tiny charcoal stove where he was busy transferring the last of the *platanos fritos* to his plate.

"You are a fool, Luis," he observed. "Do you not know that our *patron* has been honored this day?"

"Honored?"

"*Si. El piloto,* the mate of the *Carib Chieftan,* asked him if he was an Andaluz!"

The four went into paroxysms of mirth, for Pancho was a Gallego of northern Spain; and Gallego and Andaluz are as near oil and water as two branches of the same nation can be. Pancho did not join in the laughter. It was a poor jest and showed how little is needed to arouse the laughter of some.

"In that there is nothing of humor," he observed severely.

He reached in his pocket and brought out a square of some dark-brown substance.

"You speak of *el piloto,* my brave *marineros,*" he said airily, "and well you may. See what he has given me—a piece of the eating tobacco of the Americans."

In the sudden silence which followed Pancho could feel the growing respect of the others, and he expanded under it.

"*El piloto* and I, we are close friends," he said. "We are men. I gave him a bottle of Bacardí, nothing more, and he presented me with this. He has promised to teach me the boxing, if we have time when next his steamer comes to Caimanítas."

Pancho looked straight at Luis as he said this, and Luis became greatly interested in the soles of his canvas *alpargates.* Pancho sliced off a large chunk of the plug and began to chew.

JOHN O'KEEFE had been many things in this world before he entered the employ of the Caribbean Line and was sent to Caimanítas as local manager. He was of that rare type of man which may spend long years in the tropics without great loss of original energy and vigor. Most mornings found him afoot before five, and all the native employees of the line, from the stevedores on the ships to the *carpinteros* repairing the two lighters hauled out on the beach, worked under the disquieting realization that *el jefe* was more than likely to materialize from nothing at all at any time.

They still tell the tale of how in the early days of O'Keefe's régime a certain gang of half a dozen of the dock laborers decided that there was no harm in their taking a quiet *siesta* in the middle of the afternoon, and of how their disillusionment was great and sudden.

These characteristics made O'Keefe of great value to the line, and his worth was further enhanced by his ability to get along well with his native subordinates and with the local merchants, and his perfect command of Spanish as spoken in Cuba. For the rest, he drank but sparingly, was scrupulously honest, and was a man of great and varied resourcefulness.

O'Keefe was sitting at his desk in the one-story building that served as both office and residence, reading a week-old New York newspaper. He was waiting word of the arrival of the lighters bringing in the general cargo from the *Carib Chieftan,* and had just begun to wonder why they were delayed when there came hasty footsteps outside. Then the door burst open and Don Pancho Urrutia entered.

To simply say that Pancho entered is to give an entirely false impression, as he certainly could not have done so alone and unassisted. His face was a greenish gray, his head hung forward, his knees bent under him. If he had not been supported by the strong arm of that prince among men, his wife's own cousin, Luis Raola, he would surely have fallen. O'Keefe hurled aside his chair and crossed the office in three strides.

"*Que pasa?*" he snapped.

"Senor," moaned Pancho, "*El padre* should be sent for. I die!" and a paroxysm shook him.

O'Keefe ceased to look for a knife wound and surveyed the mess Pancho had made of the clean tiles of the office floor. For a moment he thought of a similar incident in his boyhood, an incident closely connected with some very green apples. Inspiration came to him, for Pancho's swaying to and fro had made the plug of chewing tobacco fall from his pocket to the floor. O'Keefe was about to tell Pancho that he was no nearer death than millions of people have been after their first attempt to chew the weed; but on second thought he changed his mind. It was one of O'Keefe's characteristics that he sometimes followed devious ways to an end. He stepped forward and felt the stricken man's pulse and looked keenly into his face.

"Enrique!" The dock superintendent who had come up with the others started as O'Keefe barked his name.

"Go back there and get the small leather box that lies on the table in my room. *En seguida!*"

As Enrique disappeared into O'Keefe's quarters at the back of the office the latter turned to Pancho.

"It is of a very great sadness, *amigo*," he said, "but you have the cholera!"

"Cholera! *Madre de Dios!*" Luis let go of Pancho, who collapsed in a heap on the floor, and made a leap for the door. O'Keefe dived for his knees and brought him down in a perfect flying tackle. It did not suit his purpose to have Luis start a panic in the town by spreading news of cholera.

Pancho lay huddled on the floor, groaning rhythmicaly and feelingly. After every tenth or twelfth groan he called on the saints in a few brief but heartfelt words. Luis regained his power of speech, which had been knocked out of him by his sudden and unexpected fall.

"But, Señor, it is necessary that I seek *el medico*. I have been much with that—that poor one."

"*El medico* can not save you. They say that for cholera there is no cure."

O'Keefe paused a moment to let this sink in, and heard the footsteps of the returning Enrique. He spoke hastily.

"Say nothing to Enrique. In the box he brings I have drugs that will save you."

Taking his medicine chest from Enrique, O'Keefe mixed a dose of ordinary bicarbonate of soda to soothe the tortured stomach of Pancho; and prepared a foul-tasting laxative for Luis. When the men left the office a little later they were both convinced that O'Keefe had not only saved their lives but had averted an epidemic. He had gained two firm friends who might be useful at a later date.

They were sufficiently grateful to obey his request to keep the incident to themselves, though occasionally they dropped dark hints of some secret they shared with *el jefe*.

This lent them a certain distinction, such as that which attaches to a Privy Councillor or the especial favorite of a potentate.

THE months passed and O'Keefe might perhaps have forgotten the incident had not the grateful Pancho mentioned it at intervals. December came, and with it the start of the grinding season. In February and March, with the giant rollers turning in every sugar mill in the island, and with thousands of bags of new raw sugar being turned out for export every day, the anchorage in the lee of Cayo Ingles was always occupied by a number of steamers loading outward.

O'Keefe took his sleep when he could get it, a few hours at a time, and ate his meals standing at the counter of some native *cantina* or else with the officers of some ship at the anchorage. From January to April life at an important Cuban seaport is very different from the rest of the year, for everything goes at fever heat. When he really wants to, the Latin can shed his indolence for a fierce, nervous energy; and he does it at that time of year. It is then that the money is made in Cuba, the rest of the year is spent in marking time until the next busy season.

O'Keefe shoved aside the bunch of reports he had been attempting to complete, and lighted his pipe for one final smoke to steady his nerves before turning in for a few hours. Pancho stepped quietly in at the door.

"*Buenos noches, Señor*," he said hesitantly.

"Well?" responded O'Keefe, wondering sleepily what had brought the *patron* of the *Josefita* to him at that hour of the night.

"The Senor once saved my life," continued Pancho, his tone slightly firmer. "Don Pancho Urrutia does not forget favors. I have news for the Senor, news of moment. Tomorrow night the union of *los estibadores* will strike."

Sleep dropped from O'Keefe in an instant. A strike of the stevedores, coming at the height of the season, would be a disaster that would cost the line thousands of dollars. He relighted his pipe and began to walk to and fro the length of the office.

About nine the next morning, with four hours work already behind him, O'Keefe boarded the launch *Caribette*, and headed for the anchorage. Two of his pockets bulged with unusual weight. A couple of hours later the launch drew up alongside the *Carib Warrior* and O'Keefe went up the Jacob's-ladder. He glanced into all holds with a critical eye for the stowage of the sugar bags, had a few words with the chief tally clerk and the mate and then walked quietly aft to the poop.

The eighteen miles separating Cayo Ingles from the mainland make it impossible to bring the stevedores ashore every night, and they remain on board a steamer the whole time she is loading. They sling their hammocks in the 'tween decks, in the poop, or in the bridge-space; and they bring a cook with them. O'Keefe found the cook of the gang working the *Carib Warrior* asleep on the poop beside his charcoal stove, and the big wooden box containing the dishes and food supplies.

"What desires *el jefe?*" inquired the aged cook, starting to get to his feet.

"Do not rise, Don Pedro," said O'Keefe courteously. "I would talk." He sat down on the edge of the box. "Have you not told me many times of your old home in the mountains of Cataluña, Don Pedro?"

"*Si, Señor.* It is my desire to end my days there. There are no mountains like those of Cataluña."

"Have you not saved nearly enough money to enable you to return?"

"Indeed, Señor, I have saved but little. But I have nephews there in Cataluña, with whom I could live if I brought a little money with me."

O'Keefe thought a moment.

"Are you a man of discretion, Don Pedro?" he asked. There then followed some low-voiced conversation the outcome of which appeared to satisfy both men.

Shortly afterward O'Keefe boarded the *Carib Queen*, which was a sister ship of the *Carib Warrior*. They were the largest of the half a dozen steamers then in the anchorage, big freighters of about six thousand tons deadweight, and thirty odd stevedores were employed on each. As soon as he reached the deck O'Keefe summoned the president of the union, one Julio Romero. This Romero was large, fat, dirty and more than half negro, but not a man to be underestimated. O'Keefe went to the point at once.

"Is it true that you strike tonight?"

Romero's wide mouth hung open with surprize.

"Who told you of *la huelga?*" he demanded.

"That is of no importance. Is it true?"

"Alas!" Romero was the picture of sorrow at the need for grieving his friend the American.

"*La huelga*, it is of a necessity. We have debated it much, I myself fought against it with great vigor, but at last my comrades made me see that it is, indeed of a necessity."

"Where is the necessity?"

"We are poor, Señor, we must buy rice for our families; and clothing——"

"This is foolishness!" broke in O'Keefe. "Your pay is better than that of any men doing work of a similar nature throughout the island."

"*El jefe* does not understand. Does he know what we must pay for the houses we live in?"

"Eight pesos a month."

"Does he realize what prices of an exorbitance we must pay for food and clothing?" Romero continued blandly. "Does he realize how much we must give to the priest for the saving of our souls? We grieve, but we strike tonight."

O'Keefe gave up trying to appeal to the other's sense of fairness and walked away. When Romero had returned to the hold he sought the bridge space. The stevedores had been sleeping there, and their hammocks hung in rows, but the place was deserted at this time. O'Keefe only remained a moment.

At about a quarter to eleven O'Keefe turned from the rail where he had been leaning to find the excited chief tally clerk at his elbow.

"*Oiga, jefe!* The cook can not find his stove, how shall we eat?"

"What happened to it?"

"Who knows, Señor? It was left in there with our hammocks, and now it is gone. Perhaps *el diablo* took it, but of a certainty it is gone!"

"Then do you go over to the *Carib Warrior;* there is food enough there for all."

When the launch *Caribette* returned from taking the stevedores over to the other steamer O'Keefe shouted down to keep the motor idling. He leaned against the rail, gazing fixedly at the *Carib Warrior* with an air of expectancy. The minutes went by, and he remained motionless. Suddenly he grunted, turned from the rail, hastily climbed down into the launch and headed toward shore.

THE inroad of stevedores from the other vessel had at first caused consternation on board the *Carib Warrior*. They were the two largest steamers in the anchorage, and their combined gangs comprised about a third of the whole personnel of the union. Incidentally, all the officers and leaders of the union were among them.

"But, Don Julio," protested the chief tally clerk of the *Carib Warrior*, as the president of the union climbed aboard, "the old one will not have prepared enough food for so many!"

"Then shall we eat first, as having to return to the other steamer."

An angry murmur greeted this announcement but it was stilled by the piping voice of the old cook announcing that he had enough ready to feed everybody. The tally-clerk was minded to reprove him for his extravagance in cooking so much, but forgot it in the rush for plates.

Some twenty minutes later Romero shoved away his plate, on which there still remained some rice, with a vague but unmistakable feeling of unrest. He lighted a cigaret, but discarded it a moment later, the smoke tasting stale in his mouth. His disquiet increased, and he sat down heavily on the hatch combing, resting his head in his hands. Hearing a low moan a few minutes later he raised his head and saw one of the tally-clerks lying on the deck, his head sticking out over the steamer's side. A racking cough shook the tally clerk. Romero joined him hastily.

The officers of the *Carib Warrior* were as much at a loss to explain the strange malady which had gripped all the stevedores as the victims themselves. They herded them all into the forward well-deck, where they lay prone and groaning. The men on the lighters lying alongside sensed the excitement on board the steamer, and Don Pancho of the *Josefita*, climbed up to investigate. He was met at the rail by the first and second mates.

"Here's another one," said the shorter of the two. "Has he got it?"

"If he hasn't already he probably will have," answered the other.

"Right!" said the first "For'rard with him!"

Pancho's curious questions were cut short by an affront to his dignity that left him spluttering in incoherent fury. The two Americans grasped him under the armpits and lifted him off his feet, they carried him bodily forward and dropped him gently down onto the broad back of the recumbent Romero.

Pancho stood up and surveyed the deck wonderingly. Of the sixty odd men who formed the combined gangs of the two steamers, not one was able to stand. Pancho's questions got no answer, Pancho's sympathy received no acknowledgment. As he stood there wondering he thought of a night the previous summer, a night when only the almost magical skill of *el jefe* had stood between him and the grave.

"*Oye*, Don Julio," said Pancho, "I know what sickness this is. I have had experience in such things. It is cholera!"

"Then are we all dead men!" groaned the stricken Romero.

"*No!*" cried Pancho excitedly. "There is yet a chance! See the launch!" He pointed to the *Caribette*, which was passing the ship on her way toward shore. "Let us wave to *el jefe*, that he may come," and Pancho hastily related the incident when he himself, Pancho Urrutia of the *Josefita*, had been at death's door and had been saved by the American.

He ran to the bulwark and commenced to wave his hat. Pale, weakened men staggered to their feet and lurched to his side, joining Pancho in his efforts to attract O'Keefe's attention. There were a few agonized moments when it seemed that the launch was not going to stop, and then the *Caribette* swung around in a wide circle and headed for the ship.

When O'Keefe came aboard Pancho interspersed his questions as to whether he had with him the little leather box with apologies for having revealed a thing *el jefe* had told him to keep secret and explanations that the greatness of the emergency had seemed to justify it. Romero heaved himself to his feet and stood there swaying.

"Have you that little box of leather of which Pancho speaks?" he demanded of O'Keefe.

"I have the box," answered the latter slowly. "But I don't know if I should give you any of the medicine. The drug is a secret one, very rare, and the only cure for cholera. If I save all of you there will be none left in case the epidemic starts on shore. It may be wiser to let you die;

then you can be buried out here and the drug can be saved to prevent an epidemic in the city."

Faced by this sunny prospect, Julio Romero rose to heights of eloquence that he had never before attained; and it was his oratory that had elevated him to the presidency of the union. He spoke of all that they had done for O'Keefe and the well beloved *Compañia* in the past, he mentioned the sorrowing wives and children of the men thus condemned to death, he even offered O'Keefe the sum of a hundred or so pesos that was in the treasury of the union. When he had almost despaired of ever melting that hardest of hearts, O'Keefe suddenly said—

"Very well, I will cure all of you, if you will sign this paper."

"What paper is that?" Romero glanced suspiciously at the document O'Keefe had taken from his pocket.

"An agreement to call off the proposed strike, and to have no strikes or similar troubles during the rest of the year."

Romero tried to evade the issue—

"The whole union is not here."

"All the officials are here. If you and these others sign, and you give me a note to the rest, I can get the signatures of the men on the other ships."

Although the astute Romero was very sick, he felt that something was wrong, he did not like the business, he very distinctly smelled a rat. But the fear of death was on him, and the others were crying out for him to sign, so he took the proffered pen and affixed his scrawling signature to the document.

As each man signed he was given a drink from the bucket of water into which O'Keefe had emptied one of the bottles from his medicine case, and was told to sit down and keep still. O'Keefe left them seated in long rows on the deck, and told the mate to have the chief tally clerk turn them to later in the afternoon, if they seemed sufficiently recovered.

TWO days later O'Keefe was making up the month's general statement for the accounting department of the home office. At the end he added together the amounts of a couple of slips from "The Drug Store of Doctor Brutel" for the purchase of a large quantity of a strong emetic, a personal receipt signed in a crooked old-fashioned hand with the name of the man who had been cook for the union, and a bill for a new charcoal stove. He wrote the item, "Special Expenses. . . $257.00," and looked at it critically, wondering how many letters he would have to write before the home office was finally satisfied with the correctness of the item. At that moment Julio Romero walked in. O'Keefe quietly turned the accounts face down, and leaned back in his chair.

"You wish to see me, Don Julio?" he asked.

"The *Carib Warrior* has just finished loading, and we are come ashore."

"And are you all completely recovered?"

"We are of such a healthfulness that it is difficult to believe that we were ever taken with the deadly cholera," replied Romero suddenly.

"It pleases me greatly to learn of it," responded O'Keefe courteously, and waited for the other's next move. Romero changed his ground.

"The signing of that agreement pleases you greatly, *verdad?*"

O'Keefe shrugged his shoulders.

"I was not worried. The wages and hours are fair, and there was no reason for a strike. I feel sure that your sense of fairness would have prevented a strike at the last moment, even if no agreement had been signed."

Romero digested this. In his heart he admitted the truth of the first part of what O'Keefe had said, and he saw no point in taking exception to the rest at this time. He fired his last shot—

"That old one who cooked for us that day, he came ashore with you in the launch."

"Being old, he did not recover as quickly as the rest of you. I brought him ashore for more medicine."

"But I just came from his home, and he is not there. My heart goes out to the old one in his sickness, and I would visit him."

"Unfortunately he will be deprived of that pleasure. Don Pedro has taken ship to return to his old home in Spain."

Romero's eyes grew black with rage, and the first words of a string of profanity came tumbling from his lips, but suddenly he smiled. Julio Romero was in most ways an unmitigated rascal, but he could also be a good loser.

"May God prosper his journey," he said.

O PIONEERS!

by R. E. Alexander

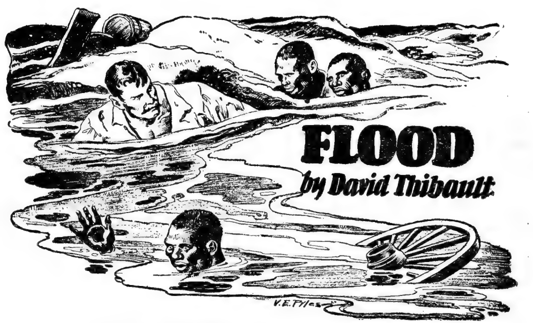
"GIT *up,* Buck! You Star! Now, Bright!
Y' got t' make th' Platte t'night
'R y' won't git no water. Say,
This 'll be *some* country some day!
My gosh, *another* homestead, Maw,
Makes *three* since we crossed th' Kaw!
Too dern crowded here f'r me—
'I'm off to Californy—' Gee, Buck, *gee!*

'What's that movin' over there?
Must be buffalo. Here's where
We git some fresh meat, Maw, I bet.
Buffalo-tongue f'r supper! Let
Me git that powder-horn. Hey, Ted,
You 'n' Ray c'n ride ahead
A piece, 'n' see if y' c'n see
Them—*'with my banjo on my knee!'*

'What's that, Maw, what's that y' say?
Injuns! *Where*—over *that* way?
Call 'em *back!* Git inside—*quick!*
Thank th' Lord these sides are thick
'N' high. All set, ev'rybody? *Now!*
Dang their *hides!* They got th' cow!
Two, 'n' a pony f'r *us,* hey?
Who's that shootin' low—you, Ray?

"Keep *down,* Maw— they're closin' in.
That noise they make sure is a sin!
Wait, boys, *wait.* Now, give 'em *hell!*
Hooray f'r ol' Kaintuck! All well?
My God, Maw, *both* of 'em gone!
C'm'on, y' red devils, *come on!*
Good-by, Ted, 'n' good-by, Ray.
Th' Lord gives—'n' He takes away.

"Don't worry, Maw, it's Canaan 'stead
O' Californy. Watch y'r head!
We'll all be gittin' Home t'gether—
Dang it, only got a feather!
Maw? Hey, Maw—*she's* gone, I guess.
A dern good wife she was—*one less!*
A-ah! They got me! Maw—where's—the—?
'Oh, Susannah,—don't—you—cry for—me.' "



FLOOD

by David Thibault

Author of "The Long-Headed Sapsucker," "The Thick Plotters," etc.

A SUDDEN shifting of the wind at midnight saved the gin and cotton house, but all cord-wood ricks were doomed.

Bain made his plans before dawn, when the sky-sweeping glare of the burning was at its height, and he stood among his fascinated negro hands, watching the seasoned wood go—six hundred cords of it.

Willie Thompson, his negro foreman, stood at his elbow.

"Cap, we's cleaned plumb out."

"Looks like it, Willie."

The plantation manager was laconic. Living cut off from men of his race and status of education, there was more to think than to say.

"What is we gwine to do? We's got eighty-five bales done picked out, an' ev'ry pen an' stall on dis plan'ation full, an' fifteen bales piled in de field. We is 'bleedged to run de gin."

"Willie," said Bain thoughtfully, "have six wagons ready by daylight, with the wood frames on. See that one has a box bed on it to carry axes and saws and log chains. At daylight, remember."

"Fo'-mule teams or two-mule teams, Mistuh Bain?"

"Two. We'll cut in Laconia Circle by the Mound. There's lots of good hackberry and oak there."

"Yessuh."

The plantation manager was a firm man but just. He could think of no one, black or white, who had cause to do him harm. Yet no reasoning man, after going over the ground, could doubt the incendiary origin of the fire, which evidently had been meant to include the gin and cotton house in its midnight meal.

"Well," he mused, "if the wind hadn't shifted, his scheme would have worked. If I ever find out——"

* * *

AN INTERESTING area lies in the angle made by the confluence of the White and the Mississippi River, in the lower end of Phillips County, Arkansas. Years ago levees were run along the banks of the two rivers, but the unruly waters of Coffee Creek and Bee Bayou, both tributary to White River, had a habit of coming in on the planters from above. To stop this, another levee was built. One end of this new embankment joined the old Mississippi River levee and the other tied into the White River levee. The system of protective levees as a whole formed a huge circular dyke, many miles in circumference—Laconia Circle.

Within the Circle the dead-level of overflow delta land is broken but in one place.

Near the very center in the lowest part on Dupree Lake stands the Indian Mound.

The mound is the work of aboriginal Americans. No arrow-heads, pottery or fragments of human bones are found there. It is not a burial mound. The supposition is that it was built as a refuge from overflows. A perfect chocolate-drop in shape, it rises to a height of fifty feet and is nearly three hundred feet in diameter at the base. The slope, thickly studded with hackberry trees, has a sharp slant. The top is the highest land within a radius of forty-two miles.

Against the hackberry trees, in particular, Bain led his wood-cutting expedition. Hackberry wood is hard, dense and heavy. It splits beautifully, has few limbs to clear off and burns more readily when green than other woods.

Twenty-two men besides the manager arrived at the foot of Indian Mound at eight-thirty on the morning of November sixteenth. The mules were taken from the wagons and tied to saplings. Axes, saws, mauls and wedges were distributed; in ten minutes the woods were ringing with cheerful activities.

Most of the men had been with Bain for years. He passed among them silent, for the most part, but watchful, encouraging and helpful; a good boss with a good crew. Three or four transient day hands were among the workers. One, a ginger-bread-colored negro of gigantic size, particularly attracted Bain's attention. Where and under what circumstances had he seen that man's villainous face before?

He hunted up Willie Thompson, who justified his position as straw boss by doing two men's work; he was determined to ease his curiosity regarding the stranger. However, Willie began talking about the stage of the Mississippi—an absorbing subject just now—and Bain forgot all else.

"Cap, is she gwine to make us trouble?"

"Wouldn't be surprized. Fall overflows —when they do come—are tricky. I talked long distance to Helena yesterday; the gage is forty-five feet there, and the crest not due to pass Memphis till tonight."

"Is dey done fixed dat Bee Bayou crevasse yet, Mistuh Bain?"

The manager did not answer at once.

"No," he said slowly, "they haven't. They've piled fresh dirt in the break, but they didn't allow for settling. It would melt like sugar. The —— jack-legs!"

And after a pause:

"Willie, I wouldn't talk about high water to the boys too much. We're in low country, you know."

"Nawsuh! I won't. Will you please suh send Uncle Mote Green heah to file my saw?"

At noon Bain took his lunch—a cold banquet forced upon him by Aunt Jane, his devoted but imperious old cook—and sat down on a log by Dupree Lake to eat.

Weak November sunshine had lured several mud-turtles out, and with extended necks two of these creatures from their perch on a slanting snag inspected the big planter. Bain polished off the drum-stick of the fried chicken he was eating and deliberately hurled the bone at the turtles, both of which tumbled immediately into the murky water. The manager held up in transit a piece of chocolate cake, and stared at the commotion made by the plunge. Instead of widening uniformly in concentric rings, the splashes had spread to the right in distorted ripples. Either he was drunk, delirious, or crazy or Dupree Lake was running!

Even as he watched there came an ominous quiver in the dark waters, and a deep cattle track near the margin suddenly filled; leaves and bits of dry grass floated and spun about in the depression. Bain sprang to his feet, the fearful truth hammering at his brain. Before he could turn, Dupree Lake rose bodily three feet, and a swirl of chocolate-colored Mississippi River water displaced the quiet brown of its placid surface. What thirty seconds before had been a quiet cypress break, was now a violent maelstrom of seething, tawny flood water!

"Willie! Get the teams on the Mound, and see if all the men are here!"

Bain rushed to the base of Indian Mound, shouting orders as he ran. The hands were huddled together, scared stiff. Even Willie was paralyzed.

"Here!" yelled the manager. "Get those mules untied—quick!"

He whipped out his pocket knife and flew at the halter ropes. Willie and the drivers followed. The animals were now wild with panic, and plunged away on the homeward road as soon as liberated, ignoring the sanctuary of the mound.

"Cut 'em loose so's they can swim. Get the gear off—don't try to hold 'em!"

All but one team were freed, when a

warning roar above which hung a whispering hiss of mad waters, swept down from the north.

"Run!" yelled Bain. "Here, Robert—get!"

"Boss, I can't leave 'em heah to drown," whined the black boy. "This is Ol' Tony an' Ol' Joe."

"It's them or you—run!"

He flung the driver bodily back from the mules. Water swirled up to their knees as they sprang for the mound. The frantic team snapped their hitch ropes, and encumbered by clanking gear, splashed after the other animals, floundering belly-deep in the rising flood.

Between the moment Bain had tossed his chicken bone at the turtles and the one in which he and Robert, dripping and panting, floundered up the mound's slope, possibly twenty minutes had passed. In that time the great saucer of Laconia Circle had been filled with chocolate-colored water to an average depth of fifteen feet. From Indian Mound outward in any direction, water shut the wood cutters in. As the crow flies it was seven and a half miles to any dry land other than that upon which they stood.

They were dazed as men are who have beheld a miracle of destruction come on the wing of an instant and who have missed death by seconds.

"It won't come much higher, boys; she's busted through that new Bee Bayou fill. It'll back up a little more, but not much."

The manager spoke evenly, in his usual impersonal tone. His manner heartened the negroes as nothing else could.

"Lawdy, Lawdy!" exclaimed Uncle John Key. "Jes' think where we'd 'a' been if we hadn't 'a' been nigh dis heah mount!"

The old man, a hardwood timberman of fifty years' experience, let his eyes wander over the murky water in which the giant red gums and oaks stood knee deep. He lowered his ax from his shoulder and leaned upon its handle. Bain looked at him and came near smiling.

"Uncle John, you didn't lose your ax, anyhow."

"Suh? Nawsuh! Any time I throws down my ax, you kin know I's dead."

"Well, it's lucky," was Bain's grim comment. "Have you ever rafted logs, Uncle John?"

"Many's de time! I rafted jes' below Newpo't, an' at Augusty, too. Man an' boy I made raf's 'bout twenty year."

Bain ran an appraising eye over the growth of hackberry trees on the Mound. "How will they do for a raft, Uncle John?"

"Dem?" The old darkey chuckled condescendingly. "Hack-a-berry ain't no good fo' dat. Hit won't float, Mistuh Bain. Hit sho' won't."

"You mean to tell me it won't *float?*"

"You jes' watch heah!"

With four calculated, slow, but effective, strokes of his razor-keen ax, the old woodsman felled a six-inch sapling. From it he cut a billet, fireplace length; this he lifted in his stringy old black arms and flung in the water. It did not bob up as wood should. It was gone.

"——!" muttered Bain.

"Nawsuh!" Uncle John laughed proudly at the success of his demonstration. "Hit sho' won't float when hit's green. Hit sometimes floats jes' a little bit *under* de water, but hit won't bear up no weight."

The manager perceived that escape from Indian Mound might be harder than he had supposed. He left Uncle John and joined the other men, who were clustered about a fire which had been lighted on top of the mound.

"All right, boys!" he called curtly. "Let's get up some firewood for tonight."

Even enforced loafing rubbed the nap of Bain's disposition the wrong way. The men sprang up cheerfully. Four or five axes had been saved. While some felled and split hackberry saplings, others carried the fuel to the top of the mound. Already the sun was below the majestic cypresses of Dupree Lake, and a tang of frost mingled with the earthy smell of miles of muddy water. A V of wild geese shot across the red west, going south.

BAIN had the wood piled in a hollow square, open on the southern side. Some of the older men, under Uncle John Key, he assigned to making a bed of leaves inside the wind-break thus provided.

"Cap," asked Willie Thompson, just as darkness shut down upon Indian Mound, "is we gwine to ever git off'n heah?"

"I ought to be able to figure out some way, Willie."

"Onliest thing—you knows how niggers

is 'bout they grub. How is we gwine to do?"

"We'll eat what the little boy shot at. It won't kill us to miss a feed or two. What we need now is rest. We'll see tomorrow."

"Yessuh."

Willie knew as well as he knew his name that they were in desperate straits. But when Bain spoke reassuringly, the black man couldn't help feeling—in spite of fact and reason—that all was well.

"Long as Mistuh Bain's at my back," he put it, "I's all right."

After the camp had settled, Bain moved from the shelter of the wind-break and descended to the water's edge. The flood was rising but slowly, having filled Laconia Circle to the level of the river.

A splash attracted the manager's attention. He stood perfectly still, and saw a small dark form approach along the margin.

" 'Possum," he rightly conjectured, and as the animal, which was looking at the fire above, came near, Bain literally fell upon it.

The struggle was brief. Breakfast for several men was assured.

He carried his quarry to camp, and woke the foreman.

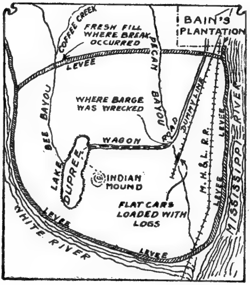
"Willie, we've got to rustle some grub. There'll be other varmints swimming in to the mound tonight when the fire burns lower. Wake three or four good men and place 'em around the edge of the water with clubs. Tell 'em to keep still and watch close."

"Yessuh. Dis one sho' is fat an' fine! Robert! Oh, Bob!" He stirred the driver with his toe. "Git Joe an' Channy an' Willis Green, an' come on."

Groaning and yawning, the night brigade was deployed by the merciless Willie. Bain sat down—for the first time since noon—and prepared to get what sleep he could. As he dozed off, a falling brand stirred the fire to a sudden, fierce, brightness. The passing flare revealed the circle of dusky sleepers, and Bain saw plainly the broad, malignant face of the strange negro over whose identity he had puzzled all day. Slanting downward across the man's right temple ran the livid wale of a four-inch scar.

A chill, bleak dawn came muffled in clinging fog. The camp-fire had been replenished through the night and now, as man after man rose yawning from his place, it was heaped high with limbs and brush. Above, through fog-rifts could be seen monotonous gray clouds hurrying southward. Below, swirling wisps of vapor alternately revealed and obscured the dark tree trunks and crept upward from the dull water like ghosts of drowned things. It was decidedly colder, with every indication of bitter weather to come.

Bain's night hunters had done well. Besides the 'possum captured by the manager there were four large swamp rabbits, four 'possums and one coon. There was no immediate danger of starvation.



AFTER breakfast Bain set the firewood squad to work, and made a thorough survey of the Mound. Just at the water's edge on the northern slope he saw what appeared to be several pieces of fence plant, embedded in the earth. Curiosity impelled, he made examination. He found a dilapidated flat boat. The corner which had first attracted his attention was all of it above water, and six inches of sediment lay in that. The bulk of the ancient barge lay down the slope of Indian Mound, under water, and most probably deep in mud.

Bain now remembered that the barge had been swept from the river six years before. Since then no overflow had broken into the Circle—until the present one. The barge had been towed there by two disappointed negro trappers whose hope of reward was blasted when no owner could be located.

"Willie!" hallooed the manager, and began to kick up leaf mold near the planks with the toes of his boots.

"They towed it in," he muttered; "there ought to be a good length of chain."

"You call me, Mistuh Bain?"

"Yeah. Here's that barge Michael and Joe towed in when the levee broke before. Help me find the chain. Maybe we can do something with it."

Together they tore up the loose earth with sticks, their finger nails and boot toes. The chain was finally unearthed. It had once been strong, and was still heavy; it was coated with the rust of six years' exposure. They followed it up, digging it loose as they went. The landward end was padlocked around the base of a small tree.

" 'Bout fifteen foot of hit," Willie commented. "Reckon dat ol' boat's any good, Mistuh Bain?"

"It won't have to be very good to beat starving on this mound, Willie. This chain's too short for what I had in mind; it's rusty-rotten, too."

"Kin us git her out, Cap?"

"We can try. About how far off is the wagon that's got our tools and chains in it?"

"Not so overly—'bout fifty foot from de edge of where de water is now. But Cap, dat water's fifteen foot deep there now."

Bain grunted. He was thinking hard as they hastened back to camp.

"Boys," said the manager after the discovery had been announced, "if we can get our chains out of the tool wagon, I believe we can drag that old boat out. It must be pretty rotten, but there's mighty little current in this back water, and maybe it's a chance. Anyway, we can't do better than try."

"Boss, I'll dive fo' dat wagon if you says so," volunteered Channy. "Hit ain't so overly cold—yet."

"You couldn't do any good, Channy. A man don't have any luck bringing up a log chain. Is there any rope or staging—even string will help—in your pockets?"

Two of the men had each a ball of strong cotton cord.

"I meant to set me a trot-line in Dupree Lake whilst we wuz heah," one of them admitted sheepishly, "but I guess de fishes is all done drownt by now."

"All right. Now twist those lines together—that chain weighs something. Uncle John, cut us three good forks for grab-hooks; we'll bind 'em together. Your hackberry won't float; maybe we can use it in another way."

"Boss," some one suggested, "ain't us liable to hang on to de wagon wheels or stay-chains, an' lose our hook an' line?"

"I thought of that. Who knows exactly where the wagon is?"

Several chorused—

"I does!"

"How do you know?" challenged the manager.

"I driv hit," asserted Channy. "Dat's why I said I'd dive fo' hit. I remembers hit was under dat big oak, juss under de spreadin' limb, wid de tongue p'intin' north an' south."

"Can you swim out there with the hook John's making, and drop it about in the wagon-box?"

"Yessuh. I *knows* I can."

"Well, get ready. John, lemme your forks. Anybody got an old pocket knife, or something for a sinker?"

Mote Green, the saw filer, had several heavy files. Bain selected the two smoothest and least useful.

"Mote, take good care of the others; we may need 'em," he said as he bound the flat oblongs of steel to one shank of the improvised grappling-hook. He then notched the shank, and binding the three forks together looped the line, which had been twisted securely, around it.

"All set, Channy?"

"Yessuh. Niggers, gimme room an' pile de fiah! I's cold now, an' gittin' mo' so bref by bref!"

Stark naked, his knotty muscles lumping under the mellow brown of his skin, the driver paced down the slope. Bain handed him the wooden hook, and himself held the line.

"Don't dive in Channy—may be a sunk log or something."

"Br-r-r-r! Lawdy have mercy!"

Splashing in waist deep the boy fell on his breast, and literally churned the muddy water. He circled under the limbs of the oak, got his bearings, shouted for slack on the line and let go.

"Come in!" yelled Bain feeling the line settle. Channy came—with the noise and speed of a water-spout, not pausing until he was wallowing in the leaves two feet from the giant log-heap.

Gradually Bain took up slack on the line. Tense and breathless, the dark crescent of faces focused upon the water.

The hook caught! By a miracle, as it seemed to them, the chain was grappled at the first trial. They fell over one another helping to drag it out.

"Look yonder!" shouted Channy from the top of the mound, pointing toward the oak.

Freed of the chain, the wagon-body had floated out of the rocking bolster. It now drifted just flush with the surface of the water. The chain had been landed. Bain coiled the line carefully. It was an easy cast, but he took no chances. The weighted hook fell squarely in the wagon-bed, and again all hands hauled in with a will.

They thought only of the good planking in the bed, but securing it meant much more. An ax, a hatchet, a coil of rope, a small sodden paper bag of precious tenpenny nails and a hammer were found inside. It took the united effort of them all to haul their prize ashore and tilt the ton or more of water out.

Bain scratched his head. That barge was many times bigger and heavier than this, and stuck in the mud besides! Well, they'd see.

"Uncle John, you and Willie and Robert go over this bed and make it water-tight. It oughtn't to leak much after soaking that long. We'll use it for a boat. It'll come in handy in raising the barge."

"Yessuh. You niggers give us some shirt-tails an' rags an' things to plug hit wid."

By nailing the tail-gate in, and caulking a small crack here and there, the wagon-bed was converted into a very serviceable boat. Then Bain called another general assembly.

"Boys, only about six men can ride in the wagon-box safely, and there'd be some danger of it swamping even at that. Here's what we'll do: We'll get everything ready, do what we can today, and pull that old barge out tomorrow. If she ain't too rotten to patch up, she'll carry us all—would carry as many again, for that matter. But if she's too rotten, you'll draw lots, and five of you go for help in the wagon-box."

IN THE remaining hours of daylight, wood was cut, the underbrush cleared from around the landward end of the barge. and a successful hunting voyage undertaken in the newly acquired boat. A number of animals were found adrift on logs, or marooned in tree tops and hollow trees. Chilled, starving, and with the last hypnotic stage of death-fright on them, they were readily clubbed or brought down with heavy throwing sticks. There was no shortage of meat for supper.

This, and the hope inspired by the successes of the day, made the campers more cheerful than they had been since the coming of the flood. Drugged by hard work and by the huge quantities of hot, unsalted meat, the negroes soon settled in their places about the fire. Bain had superintended hunting the night before; he lay down with the earliest.

Just before he fell asleep, the giant negro who had before excited his curiosity came over and respectfully accosted him.

"Cap, is you sleep?"

"What is it?"

"If you wants huntsmens fo' tonight, me an' dem three boys will go."

"No, get your rest. There's stuff enough for two days, cool as it is. We want everybody ready for hard work in the morning."

"Yessuh."

The man seemed disappointed. Bain fell asleep puzzling over it. Why should any one wish to splash around in the dark of a cold night after coons and rabbits, when he might be curled up warmly by the fire?"

He was awakened to receive just the information needed to answer his question. A hand grasped his shoulder and shook it nervously.

"Mistuh Bain! Oh, Mistuh Bain!"

"All right, Uncle John!" The manager was a light sleeper; in the instant of regaining consciousness he had recognized John Key's voice, although the old timberman spoke in a low, excited whisper.

"Boss, some niggers is aimin' to steal de wagon-box an' skip. Dey done put all de meat most in it, and de quile of rope."

Bain instantly arose, and without noise descended to the landing. Four figures were moving about in the dark near where the wagon-bed had been secured.

"All right!" he barked through the gloom. "Get that stuff out and back where it belongs. I give you one minute to get started."

The surprize was complete. The authority of the voice had instantaneous effect. Crest-fallen, the deserters began to unload their cargo with nervous haste. Bain stood perfectly still in the spot from which he had issued his orders.

"Get to camp," he directed when the work of returning the stolen goods was completed.

He followed the men closely, and as they came into the light of the fire he noted the identity of each. One was the big scar-faced negro who had volunteered as a hunter. He shot a malignant look at Bain, which revived the vague memory of a previous encounter. The other three were day hands. Bain expected no especial loyalty from any of them; the incident was closed so far as he was concerned.

Before going to sleep he woke Willie Thompson.

"Willie," he explained as the big fellow strove piteously with sleep, "that big scar-faced nigger and those three boys to his left, tried to skip with the wagon-bed and grub. Put a guard over the boat. If they make just one more move like that, we'll hang them."

He spoke very quietly, but so that all who were awake could hear. No one doubted that he meant exactly what he said.

"Yessuh! Channy an' me'll take keer of 'em and de boat, Boss."

Willie was now wide awake. When the manager had seen him rout out Channy, he curled up in his nest of leaves three yards distant from the thwarted deserters, and slept peacefully until daylight.

It was a heroic program which Bain planned for himself and his men the following day, and immediately after an unappetizing all-meat breakfast they charged into it.

The sheer power needed to haul the sunken, mud-loaded barge from the water and up the slope of the Mound would be enormous. But this force—presuming they could apply it—must be used with judgment and extreme care. The weathered timbers of the old flat-boat were none too stanch. Bain did not dare hitch his chain to any member of the barge itself.

"All right, Uncle John! Cut us a six-inch sapling as long as this old scow is wide inside, and hew it flat on two sides. Anderson, you and Abram help him. Alex, you and Paxton make us some pegs out of pin-oak. Make 'em about an inch through, and eight inches long. Round 'em up with your pocket knife."

Bain himself climbed into the corner of the barge which rested above water, and carefully measured the distance from center to center of the longitudinal beams which stiffened its bottom.

"About two feet. And there's eight of 'em. The —— thing's about fourteen feet wide."

When the timber had been prepared by old John and his helpers, it was laid across these bottom beams, and marks made on its upper surface to correspond with the centers of the beams below. A rusted iron rod was found in the barge itself, and this, with one of the tail-gate rods from the wagon bed, was heated in a fire kindled near-by.

While some of the men cleared out as much mud from inside the barge as they could get at, others were kept busy burning holes through the green timber with the white-hot irons. Corresponding holes were sunk in the same way to some depth in the barge timbers, and the tough hackberry beam securely pegged across the floor joist of the barge. Bain now felt that he had something to which he could safely hitch his chain.

A crew was set afloat in the wagon-bed and instructed to stir up as much mud from the interior of the submerged part of the barge as possible.

"Ev'ry little bit he'ps," was Willie Thompson's comment on this phase of the work. "Mistuh Bain he's gwine at dis jes' like he makes a cotton crop: Doin' ev'ry thing a-fore hits needed, an' not stoppin' doin' hit till hit tain't no use. Boys, we's good as off dis crawfish house *now!*"

"Channy, you and Robert and Alex cut us eight or ten round logs for rollers—make 'em long enough," Bain called. "'Bout fourteen feet."

"Boss," asked Willie gently, "how is jes' us niggers gwine to pull dat ol' boat out? All dat mud an' water hit *weighs*."

If there had been any doubt of success in Willie's mind, he would not have asked the question. Now he knew in his bones Mistuh Bain had something up his sleeve—"sumpthin' dat will work *shore*—" consequently he wished to anticipate victory.

"We can pull her out, all right. I ain't afraid of that part of it, Willie. Thing is, will she stand it?"

"I sho' wants to see how is you gwine to manage."

Bain cocked a wise, noncommittal gray eye at the scurrying clouds.

"Must be two o'clock. Go get some grub, boys, and hurry back."

After the men had eaten, Bain set some of them digging the earth from in front of the barge. For five or six yards up the slope the ground was smoothed and leveled. Several of the rollers previously prepared were placed in readiness on this space—one well back under the sloping prow of the old boat.

"Now, Willie," the manager instructed, "take your ax and chop a little hole in the front end of the barge—right in the middle—big enough for our chain to pass through. Better use that sharp ax of Uncle John's."

While this was being done, Bain sent Channy, Uncle John and several others to cut a supply of prize-poles, logs and rollers.

TWENTY feet up the mound from the barge grew two straight young hackberries. They were over a foot in diameter, and stood nearly sixteen feet apart. Bain had a heavy log hoisted and lashed to these trees, forming a horizontal bar from one to the other, eight feet from the ground. This timber was lashed in place with some of their precious rope, on the sides of the trees away from the barge.

Another thick log was laid from tree to tree on the ground exactly under the first. Near the center of this lower cross-piece, a hole was dug. The hole was sunk close to the side of the lower cross-piece, on the side farthest from the barge. Care was taken to make the hole as nearly uniform in diameter from top to bottom as possible, and to make it with straight sides, post-hole fashion. Completed, it was about four feet deep. With a piece of cane Bain measured the distance from the bottom of the hole to the top edge of the upper crosspiece.

"We better make it two feet over—it'll grind down into the ground some. All right! Lay this on a good, round, sound, eight-inch log, and cut me a piece just this length."

None of the men yet had an inkling of what the manager was about. He purposely kept his plans to himself, knowing that curiosity lent interest to the grueling work. Then too, he was inventing and experimenting as he went along, as the necessities demanded, and he could act with a show of confidence only by pretending to have predetermined plans, fully matured.

"Willie, pass one end of our log chain through that hole you just made, and loop it around the beam we pegged to the barge bottom. Get it in the middle. That's it; that ought to hold till —— freezes over, and it won't pull one timber of the old scow more than another."

"Where is we to put dis, Cap?"

Six men bore on hand sticks the log he had ordered cut.

"Don't put it down! Slue your end over the hole, Robert. That's it! Now Anderson, you and Albert raise up on your end. Guide it, Channy! That's it!"

The stout round timber was neatly "stepped" in the hole, and stood upright across the two horizontal cross-pieces.

"Now Robert," Bain ordered the driver, "coon up to the cross-piece."

A rope was handed him, and the manager instructed Robert to pass a loose loop about the upright post, making fast to the middle of the upper cross-timber.

By this time the chain had been securely fastened to the stout timber attached to the bottom frame-work of the barge. The free end, which ran through the hole cut in the forward bulkhead of the boat for the purpose, was dragged uphill to the contrivance between the trees. The chain was made fast near the middle of the upright log, with several yards over. This surplus was used in attaching four strong levers, each eight feet in length, at right angles to the upright.

"Mistuh Bain done made a windlass!" exclaimed Willie in gleeful triumph.

"He sho' is!" came a murmured chorus of admiration.

"Hit ain't no windlass; hit's a capstand," scornfully corrected Channy, who had been a "steam boat nigger."

"Well, what de difference? One works up, an' one hit works crossways; dey does de same, don't dey?"

"Now boys, listen: With those four levers, and four or five men on each one, walking round, we can drag that barge out. But go easy. Even a new boat can't stand rough handling on land, and this one ain't new by a —— sight. Besides, it'll have tons of water in it. If we *could* snatch it right out, it would smash like an egg shell. As she comes, *inch* her and give the water time to spill back."

Bain made a final inspection of all arrangements.

"Get your rollers ready, Willie. Line 'em up. All set up there? Hold till I say the word. Easy, now, take up your slack. Hold it! Now—all together—steady!"

There was a dumb, deadly struggle, as the men strained against the inertia of the big load. Then the barge stirred. It gave hardly more than a wriggle in its muddy bed, but Bain, watching at the water's edge, knew that in the first round, he and his crew had won.

"Steady!" he called. "Hold what you have and get your wind a minute. She's coming."

Inch by inch, taking every precaution and allowing the water to waste back from the lower end as the hull was dragged upward, the barge was pulled up the slope. After the first great tug had freed the bottom of the boat from its nest of mud, power became a secondary consideration. Now they must go slowly for fear of damaging the ancient planking of the sides and bottom.

But as dusk settled for the third time upon the group marooned on Indian Mound, the last hatful of water—they had no bucket with which to bale—was flung out of the barge, which now rested high and dry. Bain declared it time to "grub up" and sleep.

The manager himself mounted guard over the barge and wagon-bed boat. The camp was quiet throughout the night.

Dawn came in a lull of the bitter wind which had swept down from the northeast for forty-eight hours. The sky was plastered smoothly over with a uniform gray cloudiness, and an occasional small, dry, snowflake brushed Bain's anxious face as he tramped uphill to camp.

"All right, boys!" he called. "Roll out!"

Tattered black forms, dopey with sleep, slowly crawled into sitting postures about the fire, then scrambled to their feet.

"The heavy work's over," announced the manager. "We can divide our crew. Willie, take Channy and Rob, and get you some good throwing sticks and clubs cut. When you get plenty, take the wagon-bed and see what you can find for grub. Try to get enough for two days." Soon after a meager breakfast of the interminable meat, meat, meat, with no salt to put on it, the hands were hard at work.

Close inspection showed the barge to be in anything but seaworthy condition. There were two holes in the bottom, one fully three feet square, and the side, most of which had been under water, was smashed in several different places.

"Hit's sho' a wreck!" exclaimed Uncle John Key anxiously. "Boss, is we gwine to staht out in dat, an' it a-spittin' snow?"

"We'll cobble it up, Uncle John. We'll have quiet water here in the woods, and after we get to the open we'll be nearly safe."

"Yessuh."

The old darkey was apparently reassured.

Bain set some of his men to splitting long, straight logs into rough clapboards, while others cleaned the barge. The manager stood over this group and superintended their work closely.

"Don't put too much steam into that scraping, Albert," he cautioned, critically examining the floor of the flatboat. "She won't stand much man-handling."

"Nawsuh. She sho' ain't overly stout," acquiesced the cheerful youth. "Mistuh Bain, how is we gwine to patch dem holes?"

"We'll cobble 'em up, Albert. Is that the boat coming back?"

"Hit sho' is. Dey got a load of rabbits an' 'possums too. Jes' look!"

The hunting expedition had certainly been highly successful.

"We jes' raked 'em in, Cap," explained Willie. "Us found a drif' 'bout big as a island. It wuz most covered wid critters, mostly rabbits an' some 'possums."

"Well, their hard luck is our 'vantage," mused Bain, viewing the trophies of the chase. "They would have starved or frozen anyway in a couple of days. Unload 'em, and put six or eight men to cleaning and cooking."

When the wagon-bed was empty, the manager had it dragged from the water.

"Uncle John, you and Channy and Willie and Anderson take that to pieces. Don't lose a nail or a screw. That's what we need most. Don't wreck the floor; it's tongue-and-groove; just leave it whole. We'll nail it over those holes."

With a sharp ax the floor was cut in two, cross-wise; the halves were split. Four patches were thus secured. These were nailed over the yawning holes in the floor of the barge. Bain had a false floor of green clapboards laid amidship when the patching was completed. Earth was spread upon this.

"We'll need fire," he exclaimed; "we

won't be working so hard, and our clothes are pretty well worn out."

Rollers were placed between the shore and the barge, and it was gently returned to the water from which it had been hauled with such labor twenty-four hours before. The chain was not detached from the windlass, but it was slackened as the boat was eased downward with prize-holes. Launching was easily accomplished.

"Well, it floats," was Bain's unimpassioned comment.

They had done their work thoroughly; but little water came in by the patches, which had been lagged and calked with certain less essential garments donated or commandeered. The craft as it stood possessed the two salient qualities of an egg-shell boat: Great displacement—and consequent buoyancy—and extreme fragility.

Before placing firewood, their axes and provisions on board, Bain called the twenty-two negroes to the camp-fire. While warming his back and looking vaguely over the tree tops, he addressed them without rhetoric, tilting backward and forward on his heels and toes to keep from roasting.

"Boys, that barge will hold us all and would float twice as many again. But she's rotten as a last year's punkin shell, and if we smash into a log or a tree or if we ain't careful every which-a-way, there'll be the —— to pay.

"Here's what I mean to do: We'll get out on Dupree Lake and follow it to where the wagon road strikes in. Then we'll travel east, following the opening of the road till we hit the dummy-line track. We can turn north then and follow that to the plantation. The dummy-line right-of-way will give us clear going, and pretty soon we'll get to where the road bed is graded.

"The water oughtn't to be very deep over that. There is a string of flats loaded with logs standing on the dummy-line not far from Pecan Bayou. If anything goes wrong, and we have to swim, better strike for there, if we're too far to make the Mound. Swim from tree to tree. If the cold don't get you, you can make it."

"What ef we *can't* swim?" asked Uncle John Key earnestly.

"Sink," said Bain laconically, amid a heartening shout of laughter, and thus ended the longest speech he had ever made. "Now get the stuff on board. Don't leave any axes nor rope; we may need 'em."

When the men trotted downhill to their welcome task, Willie Thompson, unnoticed, tarried behind.

"Cap," he said in a low voice to Bain, "watch dat big scar-faced nigger. I heard him talkin' las' night, an' now I knows where I done seed him befo'."

"Who is he?"

"You 'member dat hold-up nigger what you caught five year ago dis fall at de wood-shed?"

BAIN did. When the negro had presented a gun at his head, the manager, who had an armful of oak stove wood, had let drive with the top billet of the load which he happened to be still holding in his right hand.

It was only necessary then to dump the wood on his prostrate assailant's head, and go in to telephone the doctor and deputy sheriff. A surgeon, a jury and a prison warden next had to do, in the order named, with the daring stranger. Bain had not thought of the incident before for three years. It came back now in a flash, and his own memory corroborated Willie's information.

"Hum! That's the bird, all right. Wouldn't be surprized if he wasn't responsible for our being here, Willie. I guess he set my cord-wood."

"Cap, I *knows* he did. Listen heah what I heard him tellin' dat worthless Fair Thomas an' Oakley Brown las' night: He say he gwine to ketch yo' widout your gun 'fore we gits home, an' git even 'bout dat other time. He done busted out f'om de Tucker State Farm and 'lows he kilt a guard. He sho' thinks you's got a gun, Mistuh Bain."

"Does he?"

Bain might have been discussing a cup of coffee.

"Yessuh. He sot de wood on fiah to bring you out, but we wuz all dere, an' he wuz 'feared to shoot. You watch him, Mistuh Bain, an' *I* sho' will. He won't talk none to our niggers. But he is busy plannin' mischief wid dem no 'count day-hands what stahted to skip wid him."

"Much oblige, Willie. I'll watch."

They descended to the barge. The provision of charred, half-cooked meat—they were learning what it is to loathe food and to starve simultaneously—was stored on board. A supply of dry firewood, the axes, rope, chain and fragments of the wagon-bed were likewise put on the barge. A quantity of long, straight poles, and rude paddles hewed from split green boards were placed on top of the other equipment ready to hand. Bain saw to everything.

"Those gunwales ought to be strengthened and stiffened, but we ain't got the nails," he mused. "They're rotten as punk."

The negroes, glad of any release from that mound of tribulation, were piling into the quaking, high-riding hull.

"Not so fast there!" barked Bain. "Some of you'll put a foot through the bottom. Take your time and be careful."

He saw the last man—Channy—safe aboard. After a searching look to see that all of their slender store of equipment was loaded, the manager carefully straddled the forward gunwale and stepped aboard.

"Shove off, Channy."

They were afloat at last!

From the Mound they abandoned, to the nearest land which stood above water, it was seven and a half miles. Following the only route which would be possible for their craft, their voyage could not be less than twice this distance. Using the care absolutely necessary to safety and propelled by their crude paddles, they could not hope to reach the plantation before afternoon of the following day, if all went well.

All did not go well.

They traversed Dupree Lake, tied up for the night and were not far from the dummy line the morning of the second day of the voyage, when disaster came upon them with one stroke of an ax.

For days now, and greatly augmented since the party had embarked, the strain on Bain's nerves had been intense. Knowing the weaknesses of their craft as none of them did, he watched every movement of every man, saw that floating logs were avoided and limbs and tree trunks passed at a safe distance.

He assigned positions in the barge to each man. The older and more careful negroes were placed where the planking of the gunwale and bottom was rottenest. Bain himself stood amidship on the starboard side. The gunwale at this point was little better than punk, and he knew that the least lick on it there would precipitate disaster.

It was near noon on the second day of their voyage when their fragile ark glided out into the open waters of Pecan Bayou.

"Mistuh Bain, hits a-runnin'!" yelled Channy excitedly.

Instinctively the eight men who were paddling—four to the side—held their stroke. The high-riding light shell immediately felt the impulse of the live water.

"Paddle on your side, Willie!" Bain warned sharply. "Back water, Anderson—all on this side back hard!"

Before the dangerous momentum given by the unexpected current could be counteracted by the paddles, the barge spun half around, and darted like a sentient thing for the bushy top of a submerged water elm. The springy limbs ensnared the drifting boat. In half a second it lay at rest in the tree top. No holes were punched in the hull, so far as they could see.

"Don't move," called Bain to the frightened negroes. "If you start rushing around we're sunk."

He crept forward carefully through the limbs, knife in hand, lopping off the smaller branches as he moved.

"We is ridin' on a even keel, anyhow," said Channy thankfully.

Bain completed his rapid survey.

"We can get off, all right, but we'll have to work like walking on eggs. These limbs are stiff enough to hold us, but they ain't any good to stand on."

"Want us to be cuttin' dese limbs, Cap," asked the scar-faced negro respectfully.

"Go to it," answered Bain.

If he hesitated to place an ax in the man's hands, the fact that he had no gun would be apparent. The manager himself handed the desperado an ax, treating him precisely as he did the others.

"Careful!" he cautioned. "If you stave in the side, ——'s to pay."

"Boss," suddenly asked Robert, "is dis up-stream or down-stream from dem flat cars loaded wid logs?"

"Up-stream—about two hundred yards."

"Dats luck, sho, ain't it, Mistuh Bain?"

"Yeah. If we get loose we can shove out into this current and go right down. If we have to swim it'll be easy to make, if we don't freeze."

"If we gits to there, we is all right," volunteered Willie Thompson cheerfully. "De water over de railroad bed won't be overly deep. Us kin wade out if we gits to dem flat cars."

"Yes," Bain acquiesced slowly, "the water over the dummy line oughtn't to be over two or three feet deep in most places."

"Cap," asked Scar-Face, "ef we gits on dat track, how far is we to sho' nuff dry land?"

"Couple of miles."

For a quarter of an hour they worked carefully to dislodge the barge. Finally all obstructions were cleared but one limb, which held them amidship, just under the rotten section of the starboard gunwale which Bain had guarded with such care.

"Now boys, listen!" the manager warned. "We've got to get off here, but we may smash this side in doing it. If we do, we'll sink in four minutes. If we have to swim, strike a line this way—" he pointed southeast— "for those flat cars. Swim from tree to tree. The water here in the bayou channel is about forty feet deep now, but if you get to the log cars you can climb out on them and get your wind. Then wade this way, northwest, on the road bed." Bain leaned overboard to inspect the detaining limb.

"Look out!"

It was Willie's voice, high-pitched with urgency and fear. The manager turned, as a gleaming ax blade smashed the rotten planking where his neck had rested. Bain had just time to identify his assailant before the big boat, listing swiftly to the inrush of water from the wrecked side and borne down by its cargo of scrambling, shrieking negroes, slid to the sand-scored bottom of Pecan Bayou.

THE tingling shock of icy water cut to Bain's very heart. For the first time in five days and nights he thought of his own fate as a thing distinct from the group of dependent beings under his charge. He shot to the surface with vigorous strokes. Already the men were swimming into the trees below.

The timber was so thick that a few strokes would carry a man from one objective to another. With the strong current aiding, this was acomplished with practically no effort. Only the gripping, marrow-searching cold of the water could prevent their reaching the flat cars below.

The manager was no expert swimmer, but a level head is half the battle when one is dumped suddenly into deep waters. He calmly turned on his left side, and struck out for a large oak fifty yards down-stream, following the course taken by his crew.

"Oh, Mistuh Bain! Don't leave Ol' Uncle Jawn, Mistuh Bain—*please* suh don't leave me heah to die! Mistuh Bain! Oh, Mistuh Bain!"

He had reached the oak. Catching a lower limb the manager, in defiance of the cold, was resting. The old darkey's voice came faint from the elm top near which the barge had gone down. Bain weighed his chances deliberately. He could swim to safety with the start he had. If he returned and attempted the journey again, with a panic-crazed old negro in tow, the outcome would be, at best, doubtful.

"Mistuh Bain, don't leave me heah to die! Hit's Ol' Jawn! Oh, Mistuh Bain!"

The white man suddenly stopped reasoning and turned to breast the icy current on the back trail. As he turned a heavy stick of sodden drift-wood drove into the water in the exact spot his head had been a half second before. In the same instant he saw the huge convict lose his balance, and fall, plunging head foremost from a limb upon which he had perched to do his murder.

Bain did not miss a stroke. Glancing back he saw that the negro's foot seemed to be caught in a fork, while he made frantic efforts to draw himself back on the limb.

"I've been lucky twice this day," Bain said half aloud.

It was as nearly a prayer as he had uttered in twenty-five years.

"Oh, Mistuh Bain!"

There was more of patient trust than of fear in the old man's weakening voice. The manager noted it as he fought his way back, and it warmed him to the desperate work.

He found the old negro clinging like a huge black locust to the rough bark of a limbless red-gum.

"I *knowed* you'd come ef you heahed me. Mistuh Bain, I can't swim *none*. What is us gwine to do?"

Bain's answer was dramatic. A cottonwood rail was shooting down the channel. He plunged after it, and returned pushing the buoyant stick of timber.

"Now just keep your head, Uncle John, and you'll eat corn bread and mustard greens by your own fireplace tonight. You ain't forgot how Aunt Sally fixes 'em, with hog jowl and red pepper?"

Exhibiting confidence which he lacked and square miles of feeling, Bain gradually detached Uncle John from his tree.

"Don't try to ride the rail, Uncle John! Sink deep, and just let it bear your head up. That's it! You can't sink; just float along with it."

The current shot them under the oak Bain had lately quitted. Depending from a lower limb hung the body of a man. The left ankle was fast in a fork of the springy wood. Only the head hung in water. The giant negro had been drowned like a struggling kitten, his head forced gradually lower and lower by sheer exhaustion. His last attempt on Bain's life had destroyed him.

That night one white man and twenty-one negroes drank clean water, ate food other than meat and slept under a roof for the first time in nearly a week.

Not only did all the men—with the one gruesome exception—reach home in safety, but the teams were found safe and sound; all but Ol' Tony and Ol' Joe, Robert's beloved jug-heads.

"It'll cost me seven hundred dollars to replace them," thought Bain, opening accumulated mail next morning. "We can salvage the wagons, but Robert's team's gone."

He jerked open an uninteresting second-class envelope perfunctorily. A cheaply printed dodger fell out.

"$1000 Reward" it was headed. Below was an unmistakable likeness of Scar-Face. He had murdered a guard and a trusty at Tucker State Farm in making his escape three months before. In bold letters the reward was again specified in the bottom line, with the significant addition:

"Dead or alive."

"Either way he'll pay for Ol' Tony and Ol' Joe," said Bain, "but I like him a lot better the way he is. Oh, Willie! Get the skiff ready!"

VANISHED CASTLES

by F. R. Buckley

AS A general rule, oppression in the Middle Ages was strictly a one-way affair; the lords oppressed the people, and that was all there was about it. But there were exceptions to this general rule; for example, the feudal law seemed to run rather sluggishly in the neighborhood of Liege. In the fifteenth century, at the time when feudalism was at the apogee preceding its decline, this manufacturing city, under its ruling Bishop, had an extremely short way of dealing with intrusive nobles. The city is surrounded by heights which, commanding it, offered most eligible sites for feudal castles, since one of the feudal jests with the commonalty was the stopping of provisions until a ransom should be paid.

But according to Michelet:

"Some morning, the mountain would hear no sounds from the city, and would see neither fire nor smoke. The people had struck work. Presently from twenty to thirty thousand workmen would defile through the gates, march on such or such a castle, dismantle and lay it level with the ground. They would indemnify the baron with lands in the plain—" where, to interpolate a remark, he could not watch them—"and a good house in Liege—" where they could keep an eye upon him.

The archives of the city, quoted by the same historian, relates that one of the barons in question, Sir Radus, returned from a journey he had taken in company with the Bishop of Liege, to find the spot on which his castle had stood entirely bare.

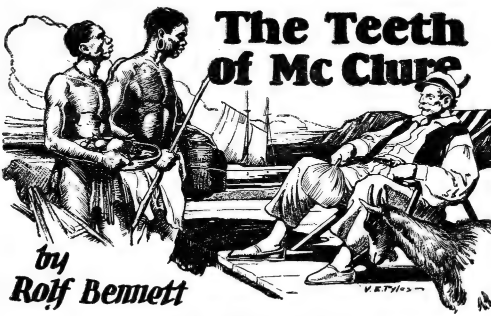
"By my fay, Sir Bishop," his astonished voice comes to us down the ages, "I know not whether I am dreaming or awake; but I was accustomed to see my house, Sylvestre, here, and now I do not perceive it."

"Be not angry, my good Radus," replied the Bishop gently. "You shall not be a loser by it."

One imagines the gentle churchman looking slightly embarrassed.

"But," he adds diffidently, "I have had a monastery built out of the stones of your castle."

The Teeth of Mc Clure



by Rolf Bennett

Author of "The Sleeping Partner," "The Cask," etc.

"SEE that island over there, away on the port bow?"

I looked in the direction toward which the skipper of the *Golden Treasure* was pointing, and with some difficulty was able to make out a faint blur, rather like a smudge of dark cloud, against the horizon.

"I can see something," I answered a little doubtfully.

"Well, that's Atimara. It's marked on the chart, but if you didn't know you might easily mistake it for a fly-blow. I once knew a skipper, not well acquainted with these latitudes, who made that mistake and piled up his ship there in a fog. Anyway, that's Atimara, old David McClure's island."

"And who," I inquired innocently, "is old David McClure?"

"Never heard of David McClure! Oh, well, perhaps you wouldn't, being a stranger in these parts. But he's a rum old bird, is McClure. One hits on some queer specimens in these parts, but he's about the queerest of them all. Yes, I think I may say that. And his teeth— Mean to say you've never heard about his teeth?"

"No, but I should like to."

"Why, those teeth of his, they're known from one end of the Pacific to the other. Famous, they are. But I'll tell you about them if you like. And it's a rum story."

The skipper settled himself more comfortably in his deckchair, then filled and lighted his pipe. When it was drawing to his satisfaction he started, and this is the story of the teeth of McClure.

"About thirty-five years ago," he began, "David McClure came to Atimara, which, as I've told you, is no more than a flea-bite of an island, as islands go. Where he came from and why he went there, I don't know and, anyway, it doesn't much matter. But he started right away to annex that island and he did it. Nobody interfered with him, for nobody knew whether the island belonged to the French, the British or the Germans and, what's more, nobody cared. So McClure, he built himself a store and imported a lot of trade-goods which he bartered with the natives for copra. And a mighty good thing he made of it, did McClure. Before he came, the natives must have wasted tons of cokernuts through carelessness, ignorance and the like, and also through not having a regular market. Well, McClure changed all that and before long Atimara was shipping more copra than many islands double its size.

"For a time, maybe a year or more, McClure was content with that. He'd got a monopoly of the trade and he was respected by the natives. He didn't try to govern them or make any laws, though some of their customs weren't what you'd call

"The Teeth of McClure," copyright, 1925, by Rolf Bennett.

refined, not by long odds. In those days it wasn't unusual for different villages to declare war on one another, have a fight and end up with a cannibal feast. McClure didn't like that, because during these fights—and when they were drunk with *kava*—they did a lot of damage to the cokernut palms and that meant so much less copra. Still, he didn't like to interfere with them, not knowing what might happen if he did, and I won't say he wasn't wise. If they wanted to eat one another, it wasn't any concern of his, but he certainly did get rattled at the loss of so many good palms. But, as I say, he couldn't do anything—not then.

"And now I'm coming to the strange part of it. McClure had a complete set of false teeth. I've heard say that he'd picked them up second-hand in San Francisco, but I don't believe it, myself. But whether he bought them first or second hand, he was mighty proud of those teeth, was McClure. And sometimes, when palavering with the natives, he'd astonish them by clapping his hand to his mouth and taking out his teeth. They couldn't understand it at all, and at first some of them were a bit frightened, never having seen such a thing before.

"Well, the fame of those teeth spread and natives even came from other islands, just to see McClure take them out of his head and put them back again. It helped his business quite a lot, for outside natives would come and trade with him just for the sake of seeing him take out his teeth. It never struck McClure at the time that the inhabitants of Atimara had made up their minds that these teeth of his must be a sort of demon or god which could act, so to speak, independent of him. He thought they looked at it as a sort of novel conjuring trick, and him as a mighty clever fellow for being able to do it.

"Now it was McClure's habit to take his teeth out every night before going to bed and put them on the veranda rail to air, as you may say. And it used to puzzle him why, when he went to fetch them in the morning, there should be half a dozen or so empty cokernut bowls lying under the veranda. He couldn't make it out at all, McClure couldn't, until one day his attention was attracted by Jake. This Jake was a young goat of that name which had been given him by the skipper of a trading schooner, and McClure had grown most astonishingly fond of it. I don't think I ever saw another animal with such a baleful and wicked look in its eyes as that goat had. And apart from hating everything and everybody he, this goat, was all horns and appetite.

"However, there's no accounting for tastes, and McClure certainly did love this wretched goat, notwithstanding it tried to butt him every time he came within range of its moorings. Now one morning, as I say, when he went out as usual to fetch his teeth and wish the time of day to Jake, McClure noticed something funny about the goat. At first he thought it was ill and wondered if any of the natives, who all hated Jake like the ——, had been trying to poison him. But the more he looked, the more sure he was it couldn't be that. And at last he got the right answer. Jake was drunk. Yes, sir, if ever a goat was soused, that goat was Jake.

"How did he get drunk? McClure tried to figure it out—and you'll allow it was a pretty tough conundrum—and, while he was doing it, he happened to notice the usual empty cokernut shells lying on the ground below the veranda. Well, he started putting two and two together, did McClure, and presently the answer came to him in a flash. The natives, he reckoned, must be in the habit of coming to the store at night and placing offering of food and *kava*—that's the native tipple, you know—down opposite where the teeth were airing. And Jake, his chain being just long enough to reach the spot, had lapped up the lot, food and *kava* as well. But to make absolutely sure, McClure had the chain shortened so that Jake couldn't reach the spot where the offerings were placed. And the next morning he found them there, little cokernut bowls filled with food and *kava*.

"As for Jake, there wasn't a madder goat in all the Pacific. I suppose he'd got to like his little drop of drink, but anyway he tried all he knew to butt McClure and, when he couldn't do that, he tried to butt the store down. So always, after this, McClure left him a little bowl of *kava* overnight—which shows you what a fool he'd grown to be over that goat.

"Anyway, that's how he came to learn what the natives thought of the teeth, but whether they reckoned the teeth themselves were a spirit, or were just used by a spirit, he didn't know. It's difficult for a white man to see inside a native's mind, or even to guess his thoughts, and in that respect McClure wasn't any wiser than the rest of us.

"But as owner, or guardian or high priest of the teeth—and he didn't know which he was supposed to be—McClure saw that he could do things he wouldn't have dared otherwise. So he started right there to make laws and regulations and other improvements. He even put a stop to cannibalism and fighting; likewise he built a wooden jetty and had roads made between the different villages. What he said, went. And after a time the natives brought their quarrels for him to decide, instead of settling them with a knife or a spear as before, and his verdict was accepted without question. For he judged fair, did McClure, as fair as any man could.

"THAT went on for years. Now and again a new trader, hearing what a lot of copra was shipped from Atimara and the big profits McClure was making, would come and fix up a store in the hope of getting some of the business. But the natives refused to have anything to do with strangers, and it always ended by the newcomer clearing out after selling his trade-stock to McClure for anything that McClure liked to give. Well, so it went on and it looked as if McClure was as unshiftable as the Rock of Gibraltar. But you never know what's going to happen in this world, do you?

"One day a new trader arrived at Atimara. His name was Joe Price and he'd come from Port Moresby in Papua—anyway, he said he had. Well, he built himself a store, just like all the others had done, and started business by offering the natives better terms for their copra than McClure had ever given. This didn't worry McClure any, for most of the others had done the same, thinking they could smash him that way, and always it was themselves that got smashed. All McClure had to do was to sit tight and say nothing, and presently he'd buy the other chap's stock and wave him good-by from the jetty.

"Well, it looked as if the same thing was going to happen sure enough this time. None of the natives would go near the new man's store and though he gave presents to the village headmen, and they took them, it didn't bring him a cent's worth of trade. And McClure was already beginning to figure out what he'd give Price for his stock, when a very remarkable thing happened.

"The teeth disappeared.

"They disappeared one night. When McClure went in the morning to take them off the rail of the veranda, they weren't there. McClure, he could hardly believe his eyes, and it was some little while before he was convinced that they really had gone. Now you'll understand what a mighty bad shock this gave McClure; all his power and influence over the natives rested on those teeth of his.

"He didn't know what to make of it at first, but it wasn't so very long before he reckoned he had the answer to the riddle. He felt as certain as could be that none of the natives would have dared lay a finger on the teeth; they were much too scared of them for that. So who could have stolen them but Price, the fellow who was still trying to knock him out?

"Price, of course, had heard all about the teeth and he knew that it was because of them McClure had a monopoly of the trade and ruled over Atimara like a little tin king. He likewise knew, Price did, that the teeth were put on the veranda rail outside McClure's store every night to receive the offerings of the natives. So, you see, it would be a pretty easy job for him to creep up to the veranda at night and pocket the teeth.

"It was a wonder none of the other traders who'd tried to do business in Atimara hadn't thought of the same thing, seeing how easy and simple it was. Now that it was too late, McClure wanted to kick himself for being such a fool as to leave his teeth where Price, or any one else who might have a grudge against him, could just walk up and take them away.

"Well, they say troubles never come singly, and it happened that way to McClure. Before he'd got over the shock of losing his teeth, or had had time to think how he might get them back, he saw some of the village headmen coming up the road to the store. It didn't strike McClure as anything unusual till he saw that each of them carried something in his hand—a gourd, for instance, a dead chicken, a *lava-lava*, as the native dress is called, and so on. They walked up to the front of the store and sat down facing it, as they always did for a palaver, and McClure stood on the veranda waiting to hear what they'd got to say.

"So after the *kava* bowl had been passed round, the oldest headman got up and spoke. During the night, he said, a lot of damage had been done to native property; fences had been knocked down, garden crops damaged, a chicken killed and even some of the family washing, left out to dry, had been destroyed. And to prove it, each man held up what he'd brought with him—the damaged gourd, the dead chicken, the torn *lava-lava* and what not.

"It was then that McClure had what he took to be an inspiration, and sorry enough he was for himself afterward. It seemed to him that nothing better could have happened. It seemed sort of providential to him that all this damage should have been done just then, and he thought he saw his way to take advantage of it. So what must he do but pitch those headmen a fine yarn about how the other white man had stolen the sacred teeth in the night, and how the tooth spirit was angry at this outrage and had played the —— with their property to let them know it?

"The only way to appease the tooth spirit, he said, was for them to insist on Price putting the teeth back in the place where the spirit was accustomed to look for them. If they didn't do that, and the teeth didn't come back, he said, the gardens and such-like would be destroyed from one end of Atimara to the other and no two ways about it.

"When McClure had finished talking, the oldest headman stood up again and started to speak. He said it wasn't any tooth spirit which had destroyed their garden stuff and so on, but the *taubada's* goat, Jake. He'd worked free from his moorings in the night, Jake had, and had gone on the spree. Lots of the natives had seen him and some had tried to catch him, but though he'd got several fathoms of chain adrift of him astern, Jake had been too slippy for them.

"Well, McClure sent for his servant—a Chink that did his cooking and the housework—and the Chink said it was quite right what the headmen said. Jake had got loose in the night and escaped. He'd come back early in the morning and Man Fong—that was the Chink—had caught him and fastened him to his moorings again.

"Now McClure knew enough about the native mind to be aware that it hasn't got room for more than one idea at a time. Those chaps had seen Jake raising Cain in their garden patches, and it was no use trying to tell them it was the tooth spirit. They knew better. And the fact that he'd tried to make out it was the tooth spirit hadn't done him any good, either. He could see that. It was a great pity he hadn't waited till he'd heard all they had to say, before trying to put that yarn across. All he could do now was to promise compensation for the damage Jake had done and let it go at that. He knew he'd made a mess of things, did McClure.

"Of course it wasn't very long before every one in Atimara knew that McClure had lost his teeth. Now you'll generally find that a native, though he may be plunged fathoms deep in superstition, has a logic that's as simple and unanswerable as a child's. And the way those chaps looked at it was this: If McClure hadn't got the teeth, then he couldn't make the tooth spirit—or whatever they reckoned it to be—he couldn't make it punish them if they went to Price and got better terms for their copra.

"There was no two ways about that, was there? And they did. In a few days McClure's store was as deserted as Price's had been. Not a native came near it, nor brought so much as an ounce of copra. Nativelike, they forgot all the good he'd done, like making roads, planting cokernuts, making decent laws and so on. All they cared was that they could trade with Price on better terms than with McClure.

"Mind you, McClure could have afforded to offer them terms that would have put Joe Price out of business in a week. But having been topside joss in Atimara for so many years, he wasn't going to put himself on the other man's level, so to speak. But what hurt the old man most, I fancy, was the fact that the natives didn't come to him to settle their disputes like they used. McClure had, in a manner of speaking, come to look on them almost as his children, and it was a terrible hard blow when they deserted him and went instead to a stranger, a man who hadn't been on the island three months. And there was another thing as well. Having lost his teeth, McClure couldn't eat anything but slops, which he'd never been used to and didn't like.

"HE GREW to be a changed man. He became thin and hollow-cheeked and dyspeptic, a mere shadow of the man he had been before his teeth went. His only consolation was Jake. Why he loved that ugly, savage brute of a goat, I never could guess. But there it was. He'd sit for hours talking to it, just as if it was a human being. And Jake, he'd stand there working his jaws and waiting for McClure to come within range of his chain to butt him good and hard.

"Now Price, naturally, hadn't any cause to love David McClure, and I don't pretend he had. But McClure was beaten; his store was deserted; he couldn't eat any proper food and his pride had been humbled—and that ought to have satisfied Price. But it didn't. He'd got his knife into McClure, so to speak, and he meant to give it one or two good twists while he could.

"He soon got to know about the goat and how McClure was sort of comforted by talking to it, so what does Price do but bribe one of the natives to go and kill Jake during the night? And for all that McClure had tried to freeze him out of Atimara, it was a pretty low-down trick.

"Anyway, the goat was murdered. Next morning, when McClure stepped out on to his veranda, the first thing he saw was the dead body of Jake with a spear in its side. From what I've heard tell, McClure just broke down and cried like a child—and I shouldn't wonder if it was true, seeing he was in such a low state. Anyhow, McClure swore the goat should have a proper Christian burial, so he dug a grave, McClure did, and buried Jake in it and said the prayer for them in peril on the sea, which was the only one he could remember.

"Now if Price hadn't done that mean trick on McClure, he'd probably be in Atimara now and boss of the island. But in getting Jake killed, he overreached himself. It happened this way. When the natives heard that the goat had been killed, what must some of them do but go the next night and dig him up so's they could roast him and have a feast.

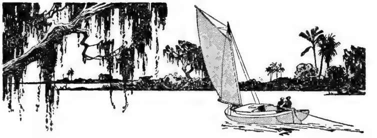
"They lit a fire on the beach—right in front of McClure's store—and started in to skin and prepare the mortal remains of Jake. This was at night, remember, so McClure was asleep. But presently he was wakened up by a most almighty row and at first he thought the natives were attacking his place.

"He listened for a while to their yells and hoots, then grabbed a revolver and went out to see what was happening. All he could make out at first was a big fire on the beach about fifty yards away, with a bunch of niggers round it. However, he thought he'd better discover what all the racket was about, so down he goes to the beach. There he saw a score or so of young natives, some of them doing a sort of war dance and others lying on their bellies beating the ground with their hands. He thought at first, McClure did, that they were holding a cannibal feast and had chosen this spot to show they didn't care any longer for him and his laws.

"He tightened his finger round the trigger of his revolver, thinking to himself he'd reach these niggers they couldn't break the laws he'd given them, even if he had lost his teeth. And he crept nearer, did McClure, nearer and nearer.

"And then he suddenly had a shock. For, of course, it wasn't a human carcass like he'd expected, but the remains of Jake, skinned and trussed ready for roasting. And that wasn't all, either. For near the carcass, just as they'd been fetched out of the goat's belly, were—the teeth of McClure!

"And that," concluded the skipper of the *Golden Treasure*, "is why Joe Price left Atimara by the first boat that called and David McClure again became topside joss. A queerish sort of story, don't you think?"



The King's Meal

by F. St. Mars

Author of "Wild Gas," "Pluck's Broken Parole," etc.

AS FAR as he could see, and as far as he *could* see—and that was very far indeed—all the world was one glistening white wonder. Mountain, hill, valley, stream, tufted wood, and frowning hanger thicket and dense brake—all white, and still, and silent under the thin sun.

He took a turn aloft about a thousand feet up and executed an effortless circle. Then he let himself down three hundred feet and described a figure eight grandly. Then he sank another three hundred feet and curved marvelously, but it was no use—white, white, white everywhere he looked and not a living thing upon it—the snow.

He was an eagle of the golden persuasion, which means that he was gaited in a uniform of fine gunmetal-brown, copper and golden bronze. Also he was hungry. Indeed he was more than usually hungry, even, and was a hot-bed of trouble in consequence.

Now, there may be a few things in this world that an eagle high aloft can not see but mostly, and at ordinary times, the thing big enough to be eaten that an eagle can not see a few miles off may live, but I don't know it.

This, however, was no ordinary time, and those few things were there—there under his cruel great hooked beak, in the open, on view to all the world, and—for the life of him he could not see them.

Motionless as one of the boulders around him, the cock ptarmigan crouched and stared up at the great dread king of the birds slowly swimming the sunlit void above him, and he croaked. All around him dotted about were the other ptarmigan of the flock, squatting as motionless as he in the snow, looking up; and they said no word.

Fifty yards down the hill a mountain hare, couched in his "form" of warm snow, stared at the menacing embodiment of death overhead, and she never moved, never made the slightest attempt to escape.

A hundred yards farther down the slope, inert as an icicle, smack upon the peculiar line of footprints which the hare had left when ascending the slope some half-hour before, bunched a stoat, long, snakey and deadly, glaring upward at the greater terror above him.

All around the stoat, yet invisible to him, were flattened little birds, little snow buntings—"snowflakes" is their pet name—and they too were all watching the mighty eagle shape, motionless, frozen in terror—as if he would have troubled about them.

But he did not see any of them. Though quite out in the open, ptarmigan, hare, stoat and snow buntings were as invisible to him as spirits. Because why? Because they were all dressed in white, pure white—except for a few parts of the snowflakes and the tip of the stoat's, or ermine's, if you like, tail, from head to heel in white.

Slowly the eagle passed on, soaring superbly, sullen and savage, ravenous and desperate. He seemed almost as if he had a feeling that prey was beneath him, though he could not see it, and once swung back again to make sure.

Then when he was but a black speck in the sky, no more than a mote dancing on the eyeball, the ravenous, bloodthirsty nature of the stoat got the upper hand of his cunning, and he broke the spell.

Some chance eddy of the icey mountain breeze had carried to him the scent of the snow buntings flattened amongst the snow all round him, and, creeping cautiously, he began to follow up the scent of one of them. He could not see the others because they were still, but they could see him, and instantly with a gentle prattle of alarm they were up and away, taking the stalked bird with them—just so many little dancing flakes of snow whirling down the wind.

The stoat stood for a moment with head up watching them go, then turned to the business he had first had in hand when the eagle stopped him, the trailing of the white mountain hare. But that hare was no bigger fool than she looked. Not so big, in fact. She had made her form in such a position that anything tracking her along her trail must approach down-wind, must, that is, give itself away hopelessly. Therefore, she smelt the deadly ermine coming, and—*pff*—was gone like some ghostly shadow racing over the spotless white slopes like the wind.

The stoat stopped dead and expressed his feelings in an angry chatter of sheer temper, as he watched that hare literally dropping down the giddy slopes to the far valley beneath. He might, of course, continue to track her with that amazing doggedness of which the stoat is master, but goodness knows whether she would stop within a mile or two, and even half that distance is a lot to a beast cursed, or blessed, with such short legs as friend ermine, especially over snow.

Then Fate, who loves to play idle tricks and give things a wobble and see what will happen, shifted the wind eddies a little, and—that ermine had "frozen" to the likeness of a marble carving of rare purity. He was smelling ptarmigan, and it smelt good. The hare could go hang himself in a crofter's snare for all he cared now. Ptarmigan was as good for dinner as hare, or better.

Flat as a white snake he crept over the sparkling snow, himself invisible upon it, save for the moving black tip of his tail—yard by yard, foot by foot, inch by stealthy hungry inch he drew on the scent trail. In another six strides he must have simply sprung by scent alone upon the motionless bird that he could not see.

And then, before he could move, under his very nose, it seemed as if a subterranean mine had burst there in that place beneath the snow. There was a spurt, a spout, an upheaval, a cloud of snow, a loud, wild whirring and flapping, a very chaos of white, and, in a breath almost, the astonished stoat was standing there alone and in silence, the immemorial silence of the mountains, broken only by the beat of wings dwindling down-hill into the distance.

He had, as a matter of fact, put up—burst up would more correctly describe it—nine ptarmigan, crouched in their tunnels on and under the snow. He did not know it, of course, but they, or some of them, had heard his chatter when he reviled the vanishing hare, and had, therefore, been warned of his malignant presence in time. It was a small matter, but it shows how bad and worse it is to lose one's temper in the wild.

It is, however, ten times worse to forget an enemy in the wild. The stoat had forgotten one, and again it was his temper that made him do it.

There was a sound in the air above him, suddenly and unexpectedly, as if a gigantic sword had been whirled very quickly, and there shot athwart him a vast shadow that put out the sun.

The stoat had no time to jump, no time to do anything. He had only time to scream his death cry before he had passed in a single grip of mighty talons beyond the worries of this world forever.

The eagle with prismatic binocular eyes had seen him move in the first place when he put up the snowflakes, from very far off, and stealing back, a very speck in the sky, had swooped upon him in that instant, and—slain.

Lisbeth

A COMPLETE NOVELETTE

by

Frank C. Robertson

Author of "The Shrimp," "Desert Fame," etc.

FOR twenty years Alex Cheney and Lisbeth had been well nigh inseparable. She was the one thing of his which he ever bragged about; the only being upon whom he openly and unblushingly lavished affection. And those who claim a mule is incapable of gratitude never knew Lisbeth.

Lisbeth came into Alex's possession in the spring of 1853 back at the great frontier outfitting base at Independence. Being but one of a lot of forty-odd Missouri mules purchased by Alex at that time, and being of a somewhat neutral, dingy gray color, Lisbeth did not attract any especial attention at that time from her new master. In the hurry and bustle of organizing his first wagon-train and getting it started to California Alex had no time to waste upon any particular mule. He did not even know her age, nor did he ever know exactly how old she was. It was true that when he bought the lot the drover made some passing remark about her, but it was not until later that he remembered it.

Many of the hundred and fifty mules belonging to Cheney's outfit were unbroken, and he had started with a goodly number of extra ones. The wild ones were worked half a day at a time and then turned loose in the extra band to recuperate. Lisbeth had had two such ordeals when Cheney's big saddle horse broke its leg in a prairie-dog hole and had to be shot. And, since saddle animals were at a premium, Cheney cast his eye over the mules and it lighted upon two small saddle marks upon Lisbeth's side. He recalled then that the drover had stated—

"That thar gray mule has been broke t' ride."

From that day forward Lisbeth never wore a collar.

Lisbeth had a smooth, running walk that was as easy on her rider as floating downstream in a canoe. She could take a sort of jackrabbit lope at a mile-devouring clip and keep it up for hours without tiring her rider. And when occasion demanded she could run like an antelope. Nor did she ever require whip or spur.

And so for twenty years she had shared Cheney's freighting destinies. There were few parts of the West to which they had not penetrated at some time or other, and Cheney himself could scarcely estimate how many thousands of miles they had piloted the way ahead of the lumbering freight wagons.

Adventures? They had had them by the hundreds. There had been the time when Alex and a friend had been chased for two days and nights by a Sioux war party, and for ten hours after the friend's horse had given out Lisbeth had carried both men—to safety.

"Lisbeth," copyright, 1925, by David Thibault.

There had been the time when, with a whole wagon-train snow-bound, Lisbeth had broken trail twenty miles over a mountain divide to get help when every other horse and mule lay down in discouragement. And then there had been that supreme test of intelligence and endurance in Disaster Gulch where, of over five hundred head of horses, mules and oxen Lisbeth was the only animal to survive, and she carried her master to Virginia City in the spring.

Winter had caught two wagon-trains in a narrow gulch not far from the banks of the Missouri. Cheney's was one of them. This time there was no escape. As the grass was covered under four feet of snow the animals took to browsing until every branch under the size of a man's arm was eaten off. Day by day the animals died and their carcasses remained frozen in the snow. In squalid misery the freighters saw their sole means of support perish.

"Lisbeth'll pull through," Alex Cheney predicted. And she did—by learning to eat meat. Cheney would roast a whole quarter of an ox for her, and under his tutelage she learned to eat it.

It was things such as these which made Alex always turn a deaf ear to all proposals to purchase his pet. Indeed, it would not do for a man to become too persistent. There was a man in Lewiston once—but that had happened ten years before. Now Lisbeth was no longer a dingy gray. She was snow-white, and her muscles were no longer as supple as they had been. Cheney still rode her occasionally, though he kept a saddle horse to share the burden. No one any more ever thought of buying her.

In the summer of '73 Newt Halvorsen discovered gold on Timber Creek in an almost inaccessible part of the Salmon river mountains. A stampede promptly resulted and by the first of October there were a thousand people in Timber City. Cheney's headquarters were in Salt Lake at the time and it was the first of October before he could arrange to start for the new camp. If he could get in that fall with a lot of goods he knew there would be a killing to be made far surpassing what most of the gold hunters could hope for. He had no doubt of his ability to get in, but getting out might prove a difficult proposition. However, he had never been one to hesitate in the face of difficulties. And so, including in his wagon-train several loads of oats, he started.

IT HAD been on his mind to leave Lisbeth behind, but he knew that she would disapprove and, somehow, a long trip without her nosing about the mess wagon would not seem natural.

Snow had fallen in the higher mountains when they reached Timber City. It was almost December, and the hint of approaching winter was unmistakable. To attempt to get back out with his outfit Cheney knew would be folly. He sold his merchandise at a good price and then began to look around Timber City itself was not high. Low down on the creek bottom were swamps with dry grass four feet high in great abundance. He knew that his stock could winter there without the least trouble. In the spring there would be ore to freight out, and in the meantime there was a chance to put in a profitable winter at prospecting.

He sent all his stock, with the exception of Lisbeth, to the creek bottom. Lisbeth's days of enduring hardships when they could be avoided by her master were over. He had plenty of oats left to last her through the winter. Some enterprising miner had cut a ton of dry hay with a scythe and piled it up by hand. Alex paid a hundred and fifty dollars gold for it. Any further provender that Lisbeth might need he knew that he could get from the boarding-house. He built a small stable of poles chinked with moss, and Lisbeth was snugly ensconced for the winter. Alex had had to endure a great deal of joking on account of his mule, but he took it with a good-natured grin.

But back in Salt Lake Cheney's business was going to smash.

The news came in with the last mail, and the man who brought it declared his intention of remaining in Timber City for the winter.

"I ain't sayin' a man can't make it out through the mountains, 'cause he can unless it snows some more, but there's ninety-nine chances out of a hundred that it's snowin' on the high divides right now," he said.

Cheney perused the letter from home again. It was from his wife. All the savings he had in the world except what he had made on this last trip were tied up in a mercantile establishment in Salt Lake. The word sent by his wife was that his partner, a man he had known and trusted for years, had gone bad. The fellow had become involved in gambling debts, and had borrowed all the money he could on the resources of the firm and left the country. Mrs. Cheney was doing her best to keep the business going, but unless five thousand dollars were forthcoming by the first of January everything would be lost.

Swiftly the freighter took stock of his resources. He had cleared up a little better than four thousand dollars on this last trip. He believed he could sell his outfit right there in Timber City for another thousand. And if he could get back to Salt Lake it would be the best investment he could possibly make. For further information he sought out the man who had brought in the mail.

"Man, I wouldn't undertake the trip out of here this winter for all the gold dust in Timber City," declared the man. "Should you happen to git over the mountains you've still hundreds o' miles t' make. There might be somebody at Fort Hall, but you can't depend on findin' help till ye git to Call's Fort nearly t' Salt Lake. It's attemptin' suicide."

Cheney thought it over carefully. No one knew the perils of a mountain trail in the winter time better than he. On the other hand, losing the accumulation of years of hard and dangerous toil was not pleasant to contemplate. He had pulled through some mighty tight places in his time, surmounted obstacles that looked far greater than those now confronting him.

"——, I must be gittin' old," he muttered to himself. "There was a time when I wouldn't 'a' hesitated a minute at a thing like this."

It was foreordained that he should make the attempt. One thing Alex Cheney had never suffered from was remorse of conscience for having supinely bowed his head to the storms of adversity. It was too late for him to begin now. Two hours after the mail carrier arrived he had begun negotiations for the sale of his outfit.

It was three days before he was able to close the deal for enough money to save his business and without it there was no use for him to start. Every hour's delay meant danger. In selling his stock he had reserved but one rugged, black mule in addition to Lisbeth who, of course, had never figured in the deal.

"S'pose yuh'll be wantin' t' buy a good saddle horse t' carry yuh out now," suggested the man who had bought his outfit. "There's several good horses here that's grain fed."

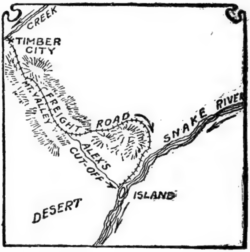
"No, I'll ride Lisbeth. She's grain fed too," Cheney answered.

The man laughed.

"That miserable ole white mule yuh got propped up in that stable t' keep her from fallin' down?"

"She ain't fell plumb down yet," Alex said grimly.

Within an hour it was known throughout the camp that Alex Cheney intended to ride his old white mule. Other men, with the best intentions in the world, tried in vain to dissuade him. It would, they contended, require the strongest horse in the camp to get over the mountains, to say nothing of the long trail over the desert to his final destination. But Cheney was adamant.



Alex was a marvel at packing. By some sort of wizardry he was able to get every necessity for the trip, and two packs of oats for the mules as well, on the big black mule. He had packed up in front of the chief store in the town, and there was a crowd of loafers on hand to give him advice to which he paid no attention. Soon he was all ready to start except for saddling Lisbeth, and getting two small sacks from the storekeeper's safe.

He had left Lisbeth standing at a tie-rack while packing the other mule and when he had finished he walked over and led her to the front of the store. The crowd suddenly roared with laughter, and Alex flushed angrily.

He enjoyed a joke as much as any man, even when it was on himself, but this sudden amusement at Lisbeth's appearance aroused his ire. It was true that she had turned white, but she was sleek and well fed. He knew that her gait was only slightly less springy than it had been in her youth; her courage and ambition had not decreased one whit, and he firmly believed that she would come nearer to getting through than any other animal in the camp. Why, then, should these dubs split their sides with laughing at her?

The laughter continued, and Alex noted sly digs and remarks directed at Lisbeth. He straightened up to have it out with the loudest offender and his eye chanced to fall on Lisbeth's snowy right side. The reason for the hilarity was suddenly explained. Written along her side from hip to neck in sticky, irremovable black wagon-tar were these words:

I'M OLD BUT I'M AWFULLY TOUGH

The wag who had played the practical joke had certainly seen to it that the words were clearly defined and that they would stay there a long time.

A slow grin overspread Cheney's face.

"Truer words than them there was never wrote," he remarked as he threw the saddle on Lisbeth. Just the same there was a slight resentment in his heart, for the joke was intended as an aspersion of his pet.

He went into the store and returned with the two small sacks, each weighing about fifteen pounds. He placed one in each saddle bag and balanced them nicely. Then he swung into the saddle while some wag predicted that Lisbeth would break in two under the weight of Cheney and the two bags of gold dust. He had made no effort to conceal the fact that he was taking his dust out with him. It would have been useless in the first place and he felt safe anyway. He knew there were men in Timber City who would have taken great pleasure in relieving him of the gold, and they would not hesitate to kill him to do it, but he felt that the winter and the dangers of the trail afforded the best protection he could get.

He reined Lisbeth lightly through the crowd, and with the big, black pack-mule at his heels turned his back upon Timber City.

He camped that night under a cluster of tall tamaracks thirty miles from Timber City. It was still early but he had no desire to overdo his mules on the first end of the trail. He fed them a handful of oats each, necked the black mule to Lisbeth who, he knew, would never stray far from camp and, taking his rifle, wandered up the creek to try for a shot at some kind of game. He had figured on killing his meat until he got through the mountains to avoid extra weight on his pack-mule, and he knew that game was plentiful.

THE HAD not gone a quarter of a mile when he sighted a fat, yearling buck unconcernedly browsing on the tender twigs of a green willow bush. It was an easy shot, and he hungered for venison. A hind quarter would not add any appreciable weight to the pack, and it would go a long way if the deep snow which he might possibly encounter should prevent further hunting.

He rested his rifle on the low limb of a tree and drew a careful bead before he pressed the trigger. There was no report, and the buck continued its placid browsing. Wonderingly, Alex ejected the cartridge and threw in another with the same result. He was proud of his new Winchester and the shining cartridges which he had brought with him from Salt Lake. They had never failed him before. He tried one more and when the expected concussion failed to occur he rasped out an oath that sent the startled buck flying headlong through the timber.

Deliberately then he tried one cartridge after another until he made sure that they were all bad. Each and every one had been tampered with and the powder removed. Since he carried his own reloading outfit with the wagons, and every cartridge had been reloaded one or more times there were scratches on them which had prevented his observing that they had been tampered with.

He stood still in his tracks and pondered. He knew that whoever had drawn the powder had done so after he reached Timber City. He considered the possibility of its being a practical joke on the order as the one played on Lisbeth, but rejected that idea immediately. Sending a man unarmed into the wilderness in that day, when bandits and hostile Indians abounded, was too serious a matter for any one to consider a joke. There was some other motive—there had to be.

His mind flashed at once to the gold in his saddle bags.

With sudden fear gripping him he turned and ran the entire distance to his camp. The mules had finished their oats and were grazing a few rods from camp, Everything was as he had left it. In a few seconds he was his usual cool self.

He did not minimize the dangers of his situation. He had not the least doubt that he would be followed, and he had no means of defending himself. Furthermore, he had calculated rather freely upon provisioning himself with his rifle and if he kept on he was pretty likely to run short. To go back to Timber City was not to be thought of. If he was really being followed he would be intercepted and killed before he could get back, and even if he had known he could get back there he would not have considered the possibility of a retreat. He simply was not that kind, and he had lost more time now than he liked to think about.

He brought his mules to camp and resaddled. Lisbeth regarded him wonderingly but cheerfully out of her placid brown eyes.

"Hate to do it, old girl," he assured her, "but we got to lay a lot o' miles between us an' whoever is on our trail."

. Within half an hour it was dark, but Alex possessed an uncanny ability to stay on a road which he had once been over, and his sense of direction was as accurate as a compass. Without hesitation he kept Lisbeth at her fast, running walk with the big mule lumbering along behind at a jog trot.

It was midnight before he stopped, turned loose his mules and rolled into his blankets without supper. For this he had a double reason: He did not want to risk a fire yet, and knowing that his grub would run short he proposed to ration himself from the beginning.

There were certain things in his favor when he came to consider the situation calmly. The outlaws would hardly dare to leave Timber City the same day he did for fear that their reason for doing so would be guessed and a posse formed to pursue them. They would likely slip out of town immediately after dark, but he was sure they would not dare to crowd him too hard for fear of stumbling upon him in the dark. They probably hoped to get close enough to see his fire and then circle around him the next day and head him off.

By discovering so soon what they were up to, getting a good lead and not building a fire, he hoped not only to gain on his pursuers, but puzzle them. Unless they took the time and trouble to track his mules the absence of a fire might lead them to suspect that he had taken some cut off and so cause them to lose time in speculation. Knowing that he had a thirty-five mile lead and knowing that he was being followed gave him such an advantage that he felt he ought to keep it. One thing only caused him misdoubts—Lisbeth.

To doubt her ability seemed almost like heinous disloyalty, but this sudden, unlooked for crisis caused him to look at facts squarely, unblinded by the false light of sentimentality. She was no longer what she had been. In planning the trip he had figured out to a nicety how to conserve her energy. No animal that he knew could cover so many miles in a day at a running walk, and it was at that pace which he expected to keep her most of the time. No day would be too long for her at that gait.

But now he knew that he would be followed by the best saddle horses in the country, and the outlaws would set a desperate pace to overhaul him. To keep ahead he would have to force Lisbeth to far greater speed than he had planned, and age, even in mules, had not the recuperating power of youth. It was going to be a close race and he realized that grim death awaited him if he lost.

At daybreak he caught the mules again and got under way with no other breakfast for himself than two hard biscuits. He found himself almost immediately at the foot of a long, rather steep hill that led to the top of the first divide. It was utterly exposed for lack of timber, and he knew the men behind him—if there really were men behind him—would possess eagle eyes.

It was climbing a hill like this where Lisbeth was at her best with her running walk. To urge her faster than that was sheer abuse and he knew it; nevertheless he felt that this time it was necessary. The slope was covered with a sprinkling of gravel and by leaving the trail or road, the tracks they would leave would be hard to follow. But if that bit of strategy was to have any results worth while they must not be seen. So he put Lisbeth into her jackrabbit lope and held her to it most of the time while they zigzagged up to the top of the divide. The black mule led easily, but both were blowing hard when they reached the top of the divide. Alex paused just a moment to look back for any sign of his pursuers but, seeing none, rode on.

They now had steep down-going for seven or eight miles; then the road led through a cañon a distance of ten miles to where it widened out into a valley some twenty miles long and ten or twelve wide. They encountered a light sift of snow on top of the divide, and it grew deeper rather than less as they advanced down the cañon. If the bandits came to the top of the divide Alex knew that his endeavor to throw them off the trail would be wasted.

He allowed Lisbeth to take her rapid walk down the steeper part of the trail, but when he struck the cañon he again put her once more into a lope. Then the valley opened up before him and he paused for a moment of deliberation while his mules blowed. The valley was smooth save for a growth of scrubby sage. The wagon road, such as it was, traversed the entire length of the valley to the upper end, a distance of twenty miles. There was grave danger that the bandits would sight him before he reached the other end.

There was no snow on the floor of the valley, but he could see where it began at the upper end, and from there the trail led up and up into higher and higher mountains. If, instead of following the road, he should dash straight across the valley he would probably be able to reach the protection of the fringe of timber that skirted it from end to end.

He could hide there until he made sure that he was really being followed and, when the bandits discovered that he had not gone out of the valley, they might return to where he now stood to hunt for him or his tracks. At any rate he would have them guessing. On the other hand, if it was to be a straightaway race he would do better to take the shortest route possible.

It was Lisbeth who decided him to try to out-guess his enemies. She was cheerful as ever. Her big ears were wagging eagerly as they always did when she was ready to go ahead, but he noticed that the muscles of her shoulders were quivering involuntarily from the hard ride he had given her. Also, she was breathing harder than Bec', the other mule. He feared that if he loped her for twenty miles across the floor of the valley she would not be able to stand the strain of holding her own.

The ground was frozen hard and covered with thick, dry bunch grass. His mules, for all that they were shod, left not a trace of their tracks. The valley, for all that it looked smooth from a general view, proved to be uneven and chopped up into tiny hills and ravines that made remarkably hard going for the mules. But Lisbeth did not falter, nor did she once break her steady, mile-eating lope. She was covered with sweat and lather and puffing hard when they finally reached the shelter of the timber on the other side, her shoulders were quivering violently, but she had not tried to lag, and the big black mule had.

They had struck the timber exactly where a tiny stream meandered out of the hills. Alex swung off, stripped the saddles from the mules, and while they drank brushed Lisbeth's lathery back with a handful of dry grass.

"Ole girl, yore a brick," he told her. "Now yuh rest up an' load up with bunch grass while I see what I can see."

HE CLIMBED up to the top of a pinnacle several hundred yards above where he had unsaddled, which commanded a fairly good view of the entire valley. Naturally his eyes turned first to the mouth of the cañon which he had recently quitted—and he saw three horsemen congregated at the spot where he had paused to deliberate. Slowly he dropped his spy-glass, and a grim look settled over his face.

At least the uncertainty was past. He knew now what to expect—death if he was overtaken. The men following him could not afford to take chances on letting their victim live. Raising his glass again he saw two of the men gallop along the road, while the third man fell in behind, driving five extra horses. Besides their mounts and pack animals they had brought along extra saddle horses. At the pace they were setting Alex knew that it would have been next to impossible for him to have kept ahead of them.

He waited until the men ahead were halfway across the valley and then he returned to his mules. When he called Lisbeth came eagerly to him, dragging the pack mule with

with her. He gave them a small feed of oats and while they ate he resaddled.

"There's mighty long odds ag'in ye, ole girl," he confided to Lisbeth. "We could put back to the mouth o' that cañon an' git back to Timber City before they could ketch us, but we never did let nothin' scare us out, an' I ain't in favor o' beginnin' now. How 'bout you, ole lady?"

Lisbeth waggled her ears in complete agreement.

Picking his way carefully through the timber Alex followed a course almost parallel with that taken by the bandits. The wagon road traversed the center of the valley and he soon found that he was traveling almost abreast of the man driving the horses. It did not require the aid of his glass now to keep this fellow's movements under surveillance; indeed his problem was to hug the timber close enough not to be seen himself. Frequently this involved tedious detours where the timber receded far up some cove or cañon. Gradually the man with the horses drew ahead, and then Alex frequently cut straight across in the open.

It had been bitterly cold that morning, but the temperature had been rising steadily. Owing to his absorption in watching the movements of his enemies he had failed to note the change in the weather until something moist struck him in the face. With an oath he suddenly took note that the air behind him was full of feathery snowflakes. Within five minutes the view ahead of him for more than a few hundred feet was blotted out by the light, dry snow that fell soundlessly.

As long as it continued to snow it would not be so bad; it might even prove to be a good thing as it would cover the mules' tracks almost as fast as they appeared. But when it quit snowing, as he was sure it soon would, their tracks would betray them.

He turned into the first sheltered cove, unsaddled and made camp. He was determined to make what use he could of the snowstorm, and soon he had a fire going and coffee in the pot. At least there was no immediate danger of the smoke betraying him. By the time he had eaten his first cooked meal since leaving Timber City it had ceased to snow. The whole valley lay under a thin blanket of white, but in the thin, clear air it was possible to see clear across it once more.

He decided that for the present the best thing was to remain where he was rather than to leave more tracks for the outlaws to pick up. Again he climbed to the top of a pinnacle, but this time he could not quite see the place where the wagon road left the valley. At last, however, he saw the man who had been driving the horses. This time, however, he was going back, and he was only driving two horses.

For a short time Alex was puzzled, and then comprehension dawned upon him. This fellow was going back to where the road entered the valley; the other two had remained at the place where the road left it. They knew by the tracks he had left that he had entered the valley, and by the absence of them at the upper end they knew that he had never left it. They had him bottled up, for the granite walls of the cañon, excepting these two breaks, were unscalable.

There was nothing for him to do now but wait for night, and the kind of night it was to be would, perhaps, mean everything to him. If only it would be dark and stormy he would stand a good chance of getting by the outlaws without detection. But if it was cold and clear——

Long before night he knew which it was going to be. The last remaining cloud had settled just above the west bank of hills. A cold, penetrating wind was finding its way through his clothing and making him stamp up and down to keep warm. It would be a cold, clear night. He could not build a fire for there was not a doubt in the world but that his enemies were watching for that very thing. To stay where he was and consume his small store of provisions, and court further delay was likewise impossible.

At nightfall he saddled up again and worked his way carefully up the edge of the valley until he was within half a mile of the cañon by which the road left the valley. Here he left the mules and reconnoitered carefully on foot. In a narrow place in the cañon, where it was really not more than six rods wide he saw the camp of the outlaws. There were several dead fir trees there—he remembered having camped by them when he came in—and a huge fire had been built at the foot of them. One of the standing trees, pitchy nearly to the top, was a mass of flame for sixty feet. The whole bottom of the cañon was illuminated, and the flickering flame from the burning tree at times lighted the entire south wall of the cañon.

THEN something near the top of the cañon caught his eye. By the aid of memory and the flickering fire light he was able to get in his mind a fairly good idea of the ledge that ran along the wall of the canon just under the top on that side. As he remembered it, that ledge ended in a steep draw a quarter of a mile up the cañon which his mules could negotiate. Only a mule or a mountain sheep could cling to that narrow ledge, but if he could once get them on it he believed he could make it.. But first he determined to investigate it himself.

He had to cross the cañon below where the two men were sitting by their fire, but so long as they remained within its glare they could not see him. He could tell from their attitude that they had no fear of him getting past them. To his relief he found that it would be an easy matter to get his mules on to the ledge, but he dared not take the chance of reaching some impossible obstacle where they might have to turn back, and so he continued on afoot. At one place he was almost directly over the heads of the two men by the fire, but the very glare of it was his best protection unless the flaming fir tree should suddenly send a higher beam of light that might reveal him. He passed this spot on hands and knees, keeping as close to the cañon wall as he could hug.

This danger passed he paused and looked down. He recognized the outlaws below as tough characters he had seen hanging around Timber City saloons. One of them he had also known in Virginia City, so he knew he was not mistaken about their character. Then he continued on until he reached the draw at the end of the ledge.

Could the mules make it? He did not know. There were places where the ledge was not more than three feet wide. Nor was it always a flat shelf of rock; there were places where it sloped downward at an acute angle that would have made a cat scratch to stay on, and below was a perpendicular drop of a hundred or more feet. But such places were short and he believed the mules could scramble over them. A horse never could. This he did know: That it was positively the only way to get past the outlaws.

He returned along the ledge as cautiously as he had come and went back to his mules. He dared not make the attempt until the fire in the pitchy fir tree had died down, but in the meantime there was work to be done rearranging the pack on the Bec' mule. It now projected far out from her sides and it had to be built high and narrow else it would push her off at any one of the narrow places along the ledge. At last this was accomplished and he moved back as close to the end of the ledge as he dared. Once more he reconnoitered on foot and found one man asleep, the other standing guard. He had hoped that he might have a chance to stampede their horses but they had been picketed just above the camp in the cañon.

He saw that the pitch in the fir tree had burned out, but tongues of flame still licked at the stalwart trunk, and might continue to do so for days. He decided that he might as well make the attempt first as last, for in the morning the outlaws would certainly discover his tracks and if he was successful in making his escape they would at once be on his trail again.

When repacking he had also torn the canvas cover of the pack into eight strips which he had bound carefuly over the mules' feet. It would last long enough to muffle the ringing of their iron shoes over the hard rock of the ledge. A more nervous man would have walked and led the mules, but Alex knew that there might be times when quickness alone could save the mules, and there would be more danger of disaster with him in front unable to get out of their way than if he was riding.

Sniffing softly Lisbeth reluctantly set her canvas covered feet on to the narrow ledge. The Bec' mule at first refused to follow, but after she was once persuaded on to it she pressed hard on Lisbeth's heels in her terror. With dark, towering cliffs above, an abyss with leaping flames beneath, and the most precarious footing in the world under their feet it was no wonder that the mules seemed fairly to shrivel in their terror.

Alex could hear the harsh grating of the pack along the rock as Bec' crowded frantically away from the edge. He could feel it ever so slightly with his own right leg. Occasionally it would bump rather hard, but instantly Lisbeth would swerve away. In all the years that he had ridden her Lisbeth had never yet bruised his legs. When going between trees, for instance, if there was not room to get through without gouging her rider's legs she would not go through.

Once, as they rounded a turn on the ledge the pack caught on the edge of a projecting boulder. There was a loud, tearing sound, and then the rattle of camp utensils as Bec' shot wildly ahead. Alex saw the man on guard below spring to his feet and look around wildly. Once more the pack rasped against the rock and the fellow called to his companion, who leaped from his blankets fully dressed.

Alex was now approaching the point directly above the flaming fir tree. He dared not hesitate now, for once the men's eyes became accustomed to the shadows they would almost surely be able to make out the figures of the mules above their heads. With a light pressure of his heels against Lisbeth's ribs he urged her forward, and the same moment, almost, a tongue of flame on the dead fir leaped high, making the ledge for a distance of twenty feet as plain as day. It died down again instantly, but not before Alex heard the men's yell of discovery.

Immediately there came the crack of a rifle and a bullet spatted against the rock directly over Cheney's head. The other man began firing with his revolver, and it seemed to Alex that bullets were fairly raining around him. The least misstep on Lisbeth's part, he knew, would send them hurtling to their death. She had quickened her pace of her own accord to her fastest running walk, but he could also sense the sureness of every step.

Then he heard the Bec' mule give a frightened snort. There was a sound of feet sliding over rock and the rope was jerked from his hand. Glancing back over his shoulder he barely glimpsed the black mule disappearing over the rim. A moment later a hollow sound coming from near the base of the burning fir floated up to him, accompanied by triumphant yells from the bandits.

"Git above 'im!" Alex heard one of the outlaws yell.

One chance alone remained to him—to get off the ledge and into the road before they could intercept him. "Come on, ole girl," he implored, and pressed Lisbeth's white sides harder with his heels. She broke into her slow lope.

It would have been dangerous enough in daylight to turn a man's hair white, and the shift of snow on the rock made it yet more dangerous; Cheney's hair stood on end. Occasionally a foot slipped, and once Lisbeth went down on her knees, but with the quickness of a cat she recovered and scrambled on. And then, almost before he knew it, they were in the steep draw at the end of the ledge. Alex became aware that he had been holding his breath for a length of time that seemed ages.

They were quickly in the road again and ahead of their pursuers, but Alex knew the outlaws would quickly be saddled and on his trail. He was almost ready to pull up and accept whatever fate the outlaws had in store for him. Even if Lisbeth had stamina enough to keep ahead of the horses—and it seemed an impossible thing to expect—they were doomed anyway on account of the loss of the pack mule with their supplies. To think of making a trip of hundreds of miles with neither food nor weapons was like the impossible optimism of a lunatic, but behind them were the outlaws and sure death.

"It's up to you, ole girl," he whispered in Lisbeth's big ear. "I ain't a goin' to urge ye. If ye feel like stoppin' we will."

But apparently Lisbeth sensed the menace behind for she showed no disposition to slacken her pace. Wherever it was possible to do so she maintained her jackrabbit lope, and where it was too steep for that her fast walking gait carried her swiftly to the top.

DAYLIGHT found them well into the highest range of mountains they would have to encounter. The snow on the level was six or eight inches deep and near the tops of the ridges there were drifts that frequently were belly deep. And in that high altitude Alex knew the weather could change suddenly. It was cold now, but it might be snowing before noon. He stopped Lisbeth and dismounted while she rested. The outlaws were not in sight, but he knew the respite would be brief. Clouds of steam were arising from the old white mule's hide, her shoulder muscles were quivering and she was breathing hard.

Alex tentatively hefted the saddle bags, and a wry, bitter grin came on his face.

"Mebbe it's a funny thing to say but I wish t' —— I could trade this gold dust fer the same weight in oats," he murmured.

Suddenly he caught sight of his pursuers little more than a mile behind him. The discovery was mutual for he saw the leading outlaw wave jubilantly. Alex looked at his old pet doubtfully. In years gone she would have had her wind back after such a rest, but now her heaving had scarcely diminished.

"Well, we've started this we'd just as well see it through," he ejaculated suddenly, and swung into the saddle.

The outlaws were gaining, and each of them led a relief horse. Alex could see that they were whipping mercilessly in an endeavor to end the chase at once, and he was compelled to ask Lisbeth for more speed.

Then the outlaws changed horses and despite Lisbeth's best efforts Alex saw that it was the beginning of the end. Not much longer could the aged mule maintain the grueling pace. He looked at his watch and was amazed to find that it was two o'clock in the afternoon. At any rate Lisbeth had given the bandits a race that they would long remember, and she had justified his faith in her. But to save her further punishment he decided to give up.

And then he saw something ahead that gave him an inspiration. To his right loomed a short, steep cañon leading to a divide to the south. The road continued in the deeper cañon they were in to the east around a spur-range of mountains. When he had come in he had noted that if it were possible to cross this spur-range a least a hundred miles of road would be cut off. He had known, however, that wagons could never traverse that route, but now, in their desperate situation it might be worth their while for him and Lisbeth to make the attempt.

The particular thing that influenced him to make the attempt was the seeming inaccessibility of this cañon. It was shut off from the main cañon by a barrier of cliffs and loose shale rock extending clear across the base. But with one swift, calculating glance Alex estimated Lisbeth's chance to climb, and gave her about one in three. One thing he did know was that if they could make it no horse could follow. If they failed, well, the chase might as well end here as elsewhere.

He rode Lisbeth to the very foot of it and dismounted. Then, giving her plenty of rope, he began the ascent, carefully picking a way where it was possible for her to follow. Up and up they clambered until from a great distance they must have resembled two flies clinging to the sides of a wall. There were places where Alex seized jutting edges of rock to help himself along, and once he saved Lisbeth from disaster only by a quick turn of the rope around a projecting rock which held her until she recovered her balance.

The outlaws reached the foot of the precipice just before Alex and his mule reached the top. Before they could use their rifles Alex struggled to the top and, bracing his feet, surged back against the lead rope and helped Lisbeth over the last obstruction.

Alex was in no hurry to leave. He led Lisbeth out of sight and returned to where he could watch the two men below. One of them tried vainly to spur his horse up the incline, but was quickly compelled to give it up. The outlaws held a consultation, and then one of them began to climb the precipice. Alex had gathered a dozen rocks the size of apples and he waited grimly for the fellow to come within reach. A rock at that range was as good as a bullet. When the fellow came within range he hurled a missile that struck his man squarely in the chest. It broke his hold, and the fellow rolled and bounded to the bottom.

Satisfied now that there would be no further pursuit, Alex mounted his mule and began a tortuous ascent of the cañon, winding in and out among the trees and dodging unlooked for ledges of rock. At dark he stopped. He had no fear of pursuit. The outlaws, knowing well his predicament, would probably wait at the foot of the cañon for him to return. Well, let them, he thought grimly. There was no more to be lost by going ahead than there was by going back. He unsaddled Lisbeth and turned her loose on a wind-swept ridge where the grass stuck above the snow. She, at least, need not go hungry yet, though he well knew there was little strength in the frozen grass.

He gathered dead limbs from fallen trees and built a fire. The warmth made him forget his hunger and presently he fell asleep. From time to time he roused to heap more wood on the fire, but along toward morning it began to snow and when he finally awoke the fire was out and the saddle blanket which covered him was weighted down with three inches of snow.

He did not trouble to rebuild his fire but caught Lisbeth at once. He threw the saddle on her and mounted. At noon they reached the top of the divide. It was still snowing, thus obscuring the view that lay before him, but Alex knew that it was wild and bad enough. Yet somewhere on the other side of those mountains lay the desert. He dismounted to allow Lisbeth to rest and discovered that his fast had made him weak. For a moment he was the victim of despair. There was not one chance in a thousand that they could ever get through. Why waste themselves going on? And then he realized that to stop would only be to prolong the inevitable end.

His eyes chanced to fall upon the bulging saddle bags. He laughed hollowly. Here was poor old Lisbeth being weighted down by thirty odd pounds of useless gold dust. The best he could do was to relieve her of that. He wondered why he had not thought to throw those sacks in the trail while the outlaws were pursuing him. It might have raused them to be satisfied. And then his resentment against them flared up and he was glad that he had not.

He took out one sack of the dust and laid it on the snow. Almost absent-mindedly he felt in the bottom of the saddle bag, but he suddenly jumped as though he had experienced an electric shock. His fingers had touched something round, smooth, and hard. His fingers trembled and shook as he brought the cartridge into view. He remembered then of having carelessly dropped several of them into that saddle bag weeks before when he had not cared to be burdened with them in his pocket. He reached in again and brought forth three more shining cylinders. There was not the faintest sign that they had been tampered with, and he was sure that they were good.

"Lisbeth, ole girl, we got a fightin' chance yet," he told the old white mule.

He put the sack of dust back into the saddle bag and again rode on. But now he carried his rifle across the saddle in front of him, and his eyes were alert for signs of game. It was snowing steadily, the wind was rising, and he was forever being compelled to wipe the snow out of his eyes that he might see.

Suddenly he sighted a pine hen on a low branch of a tree. He knew he could shoot it, but it would scarcely make a meal. After a desperate mental struggle he rode on with his hunger increased tenfold, but he knew that he must have bigger game.

Just before dark they reached the bottom of a deep cañon with a blizzard now sweeping overhead. There was shelter here in the thick timber, wood and water in abundance and, what was of more account, numerous bushes with twigs so tender that Lisbeth could chew them.

ALEX slipped the saddle off and at once moved off up the cañon with his rifle. If there was game close he knew the storm would bring it to the bottom of the cañon for protection. He was working his way against the wind and it bothered him to see, but he dared not let the game get his scent. In the gathering twilight he saw a huge porcupine clinging to the limb of a pine. He knew that he must eat soon, and there was small chance of getting anything else. He took careful aim and fired. He saw the porcupine drop like a rock, but the same moment he was startled by a band of eight deer that suddenly leaped from the brush a short distance ahead of him and bounded away through the snow.

He jerked in another cartridge and fired at a fat doe. But his haste, and the snow which half blinded him spoiled his aim. He saw her stumble, but the next moment she was up and plunging after the others. Though he knew she was rather badly wounded he knew how hopeless it would be to try to follow her in the dark and the snow would soon annihilate all tracks. He had to get her now or not at all. Once more he aimed and fired. It was a longer mark, but a better one. This time the doe was dead.

He carried the doe back to where he had left Lisbeth and then returned for the porcupine. He built a fire and dressed his kill, and then he dined sumptuously on porcupine. He had but one cartridge left, but he had a supply of meat that would last him for days.

It was three days before they could leave that camp. With each hour the storm increased in fury and Alex, skilled mountaineer that he was, knew how futile it would be to try to buck it. He employed his time making himself a pair of snowshoes out of woven willows, but his heart was heavy when he thought of Lisbeth. How was she to get out? He almost expected to see resentment or reproach in her soft, brown eyes, but the aged veteran browsed placidly as if without a care in the world. But she was no longer fat and sleek.

He felt that the most merciful thing he could do would be to put an end to her suffering with his last bullet, but he knew that this would not do yet. She would be able to flounder through the snow for a while and he needed her. She could carry his remaining supply of meat for a while, to say nothing of the gold dust, and that one bullet might yet mean life or death to him.

Then, for three days more Alex tramped his way through the snow, and marveled that the intrepid old mule was able to follow him. At times the going was comparatively easy for him where the crust was strong enough to hold him up, but it would never bear Lisbeth's weight; indeed, it hampered her at every step.

They encountered drifts which it was impossible for her to fight her way through. When she had plunged until she could go no longer she would lay on her side and look at Alex with a gaze of calm confidence. And with an oath, and sometimes with tears of desperation in his eyes he would set to work tramping down the drift until finally there would be a trail upon which she could wallow through.

Alex was eating discreetly and retaining his strength, but they seldom encountered anything that Lisbeth could feed on. Daily her master could see her growing weaker, but there seemed no end to her stamina. Long before this a younger animal would have quit, he knew, just as, perhaps, would a younger man in his shoes. It was the patience and experience of age that was carrying them both through. Once he tested her with a piece of roasted venison, but she seemed to have forgotten the knack of eating meat which she had acquired so long ago. Knowing how very much he needed it himself he did not insist.

They suddenly broke out of the mountains on to the floor of the desert, but Alex was doomed to disappointment. Where he had expected to find but little snow there was two feet on the level and crusted hard. Yet it was not quite strong enough to bear Lisbeth's weight. Now it seemed was the time to kill her, but still he could not bring himself to do it. He still had food, and as long as she was able to travel at all he meant to stay with her.

They were three days reaching Snake River. Lisbeth had somehow managed to keep herself alive by eating the tops of the sage, and at night by pawing through the snow occasionally foraged a few mouthfuls of bunch grass. Alex's food supply was again exhausted.

They had reached the main Montana freight road, but Cheney knew only too well that the freighters were not accustomed to traversing its pitiless length in the winter time. His best bet was that he might encounter some belated traveler like himself. But he saw at once that there had been no one over the road since the storm. There was one chance in a hundred that some one might overtake him, but the men most likely to do that were the very outlaws he had recently escaped from.

He was reasonably sure that the bandits would not dare to return to Timber City. Neither was it likely that they would turn north and try to buck the deep snows over the Continental Divide. This left them one of two resources. They must either turn south on the road he was on, or else make for some secret outlaw hang-out in the vicinity. If they did turn south he knew that, excepting for some unusual adversity, they would soon be along, for though their route would be much longer than the one he had taken they would make much better time. Their horses would be fresher and stronger, and trail breaking would not be so difficult for them since they could take turns in the lead.

Alex was brought face to face with the stern necessity of making better time. If the outlaws were on his trail Lisbeth's trail through the broken crust would lay an easy course for them to follow, and he could no longer hope for the old white mule to keep ahead of such overwhelming odds. Even if not pursued by the outlaws he knew that he could no longer afford to be held back by Lisbeth for whom the going became worse with each successive mile.

The stern line of necessity to which he knew he should closely hew was plainly marked. He was out of provisions. He had but one bullet left, and a sharp knife. He ought to slit Lisbeth's old white throat, cook and eat part of her carcass, and carry with him as much as he could manage on his improvised snowshoes. If the crust held he could thus, without doubt, make it through to Fort Hall at any rate. Otherwise he faced a fair assurance of starvation, for though he had one bullet left he had not sighted game of any description since he had struck the desert.

"Well," he grumbled into his beard, "if it has t' be it has t' be, but I can't do it tonight. I'll wait till mornin'."

And he pressed on with Lisbeth wearily breaking through the crust behind him for another two hours.

THAT night he ate the last few scraps of his venison, and boiled his saddle strings to eke out the meal. For the first time in their arduous journey Lisbeth made no effort to obtain food for herself. She tramped out a place through the crust large enough to lie down in and dropped on her side. Through the long, weary hours while he gathered dead willows to heap upon his fire Alex contemplated her with remorseful eyes.

Toward morning he fell into a doze and when he awoke a red, discouraged looking sun was sending slanting rays of slight heat across the unyielding surface of the snow. Lisbeth had got to her feet and was pawing about the roots of willow bush from which she occasionally extracted a mouthful of dry grass. As he came toward her determinedly with his keen bladed knife in his hand her big ears shot forward kindly and she greeted him with the old familiar bray.

"——," he muttered, "I can't do it—not with a knife anyway."

He knelt down on the fire-dried ground and considered. He had one bullet, and it was sufficient to do the business. After all he could carry mule meat enough to last him to Fort Hall, and if he did not find any one there to give him aid his case was hopeless anyway. He might just as well waste the bullet here and put Lisbeth forever out of her misery. He brought his rifle to his shoulder and squinted along the sights to the exact center of her forehead. Lisbeth's ears came up in mild curiosity. Alex knew that the old mule knew the death dealing properties of a gun, and her placid confidence was entirely too much for him. He dropped the butt of the rifle into the snow with a curse.

"I'd be a ——, cowardly murderer now t' kill ye, ole girl, after all these years we put in together," he jerked out.

He threw his arm around her neck and rubbed his be-whiskered face along the soft, white hair on her jaw. A spasm of weakness that, beginning in his troubled mind, communicated itself to his body caused him to throw all his weight on the old mule's neck, and presently he noted that she was holding him up.

"Ain't all in yet, are yuh, Lisbeth?" he marveled. "Well, I can't take ye with me no farthur, an' I simply ain't got the heart t' kill ye. The only thing left is t' leave ye behind. There ain't one chance in seven million fer ye t' pull through the winter, but at least yuh can die a nat'ral death—unless the wolves git ye—an' that's more in the nature of a mule."

A mile away and nearer to the river he could see what looked to be a swamp, and swamps frequently had grass.

"Come on," he said almost gruffly, "that may be a better place t' leave yuh than this is."

As he approached the swamp he saw that it was really an island in the river. It was covered over with willow clumps, now bent over and loaded down with snow till they resembled innumerable little snow mounds or igloos, with here and there tall alders projecting nakedly in the air.

The river was frozen over and they had no difficulty reaching the island. Alex was disappointed, for there was not a blade of grass in sight, and the snow seemed deeper and crusted harder than in any place he had yet encountered. But they had been an hour and a half coming that mile and he could not delay longer.

He had tried to bring himself to kill the old white mule and failed. He was not the man to waste time fighting the battle over again. He stripped saddle and hackamore from Lisbeth and left her free. For a moment he stood over the saddle bags, pondering. It seemed the part of reason to conceal the two bags of gold dust there on the island and go on as lightly loaded as possible, but he was a man of dogged persistence. He had set out for the sole purpose of saving his business. What would it profit him if he did get through and then had to see it go to smash for lack of this gold? Resolving that if he got through at all it would not be in vain he stooped and lifted the sacks of the saddle bags.

"If I'd killed ole Lisbeth I'd a loaded myself down heavier than this," he reconciled himself as he made a pack bag of a single blanket into which he slung the dust. Then, with his rifle in his hand, he marched away.

Since the river was frozen he decided to follow it. From time to time he meant to crawl to some elevation and inspect the road. If any one was coming he would see them; if the outlaws he could hide; if any one else he could make his presence known.

Only once did he look back. Lisbeth was still standing where he had left her. Her long ears were pointed straight ahead, and he knew that she was trying to figure out the reason for his desertion. A hot sob came into his throat. He waved his hand as he would at a fellow traveler, and rounding a bend in the river disappeared from sight.

For two hours Lisbeth stood where Cheney had left her, looking toward the place where her master had disappeared. Then, at last, she turned her head and gazed at the saddle which she had carried for so many hundred miles. She heaved a deep breath, that was almost a sigh, and began to move.

She had no intention of following Alex, for the saddle represented camp, and she had learned long ago not to stray far from it. Neither did she doubt that Alex would return. She began to paw in the little circle of tramped down snow. Her little feet, with the thin, wafer-like iron shoes, sent snow flying in all directions, but they uncovered no grass. What they did encounter was an uneven surface of ice. Late in the fall the island, which was really a swamp, had in most places been under water. It had frozen hard, then snowed, thawed, and frozen again. Such grass as there was was protected by an armor of ice.

Hour after hour Lisbeth pawed patiently at the ice. Occasionally she obtained a few spears of rank grass as a reward for her efforts, but not nearly enough to compensate for the energy required to get them. Gradually she widened the circle around her, but that was hard work.

Along toward night she determined to try a large willow bush that she could see fifty feet away. The edge of the crust was breast high. Bands of horses have been known to starve rather than attempt to conquer such an obstruction. But not Lisbeth. She reared up until her front feet were above the edge and lunged forward with all her strength. The crust collapsed under her weight and she came down on her side. But in a moment she was up repeating the maneuver, and with each lunge she gained a few feet.

But unfortunately for the poor old mule the willow bush was hardly worth the effort. It was water-killed, and its branches were bare and destitute of bark. In dry sticks there was no nourishment—even for mules.

The cold that night was intense. A hard wind sprang up from the northwest, and despite the hard, scintillating surface of the crust a fine, powdery snow was picked up somewhere by the wind and driven along with such force that the tiny particles struck the old mule's hide and stung like innumerable pin pricks.

Lisbeth got behind the willow bush as best she could and humped her back to the storm. Morning found her cold, weak, and miserable. Death was preferable to further exertion. But in Lisbeth's mulish make-up was an indomitable courage that could not accept defeat so long as there was the possibility of victory. At first, when she began to move, her legs were stiff and unwieldy as stilts, but after several fruitless attempts to break trail they became more pliable and she was again able to go forward.

Night found her nearly half a mile from where Alex had left her, and she had located a patch of young, second growth willows from whose bark she was able to obtain some slight nourishment despite the fact that her teeth had been worn short and smooth by the years.

THEN, suddenly, her big ears shot forward eagerly. She had heard the sound of men's voices. But it was not Alex's voice that she heard, and so she waited where she was. Soon two men came forward on foot. She could see another man farther back with some horses.

"There's his mule," one of the men exclaimed. "Now what d'ye make of it?"

"What gits me," said the other man, "is how he was able t' git this fur without grub an' without bullets, an' on that miserable ole white mule besides. Reckon though hunger's got him an' he's gone loco an' wandered off."

"Loco?" sneered the first speaker. "Not so —— loco that he didn't know enough t' take them sacks o' gold dust with him."

"Mebbe he throwed them away long ago t' lighten pack," suggested the other.

"Lighten nothin'. I know Cheney. Whatever he undertakes he'll stick to it to the end. The truth is the old mule give out an' he took the dust an' went on in a desperate chance to reach Fort Hall. He can't a been gone long, an' as we know the fix he was in he must be awful weak. The question is do we foller him toward Fort Hall or head direct for Dutchy's hang-out?"

"Foot or hoss-back—if we try to foller 'em?"

"Horses. Eight horses an' three men ought to make better time than one man afoot," replied the dominant man in the party. "Lucky for us we still got them two extra sacks of oats that rolled off that ledge with Cheney's black mule. They'll keep our horses alive till we reach Dutchy's—it can't be more than twenty-five miles from here—an' after that we don't care what becomes of 'em."

Neither of the outlaws noticed Lisbeth's long ears shoot forward at the mention of oats, but the word carried a distinct meaning to the old white mule. "Come git yer oats," was a phrase of Alex's which she had long understood perfectly.

The men turned back on the trail which she had wallowed down as if not deigning her worthy of further notice. Presently the cheerful smell of smoke assailed her nostrils. She knew the men were making camp where she had been unsaddled, and something was urging her strongly to follow them back. And yet, when she drew close she sensed something alien. Or perhaps various experiences of hers around camps where Alex was not present to protect her came to her remembrance. For Lisbeth, for all her good qualities, had been so petted and pampered by her master that she had become a veritable camp nuisance. At any rate she hung back in the darkness until the three men around the camp fire had spread out their blankets and rolled in.

Some fifty feet back of the camp she could see the huddled horses of the outlaws. They had been given a small feed of oats each, enough to keep them alive, and left tied up because there seemed nothing else for them to eat. Still, she waited until only a few smoldering embers of the fire remained before she actually invaded the camp ground of the outlaws, and then as she glided noiselessly forward her white form against the background of snow was as invisible as a ghost to the casual eye.

Two objects lying close to the pack saddles, and at the very foot of the bed where the three outlaws were sleeping together held most, but not quite all of her attention. As she moved forward the ear next to the sleeping men was cast warily backward, and her right eye, that next to the men, seldom strayed far from the bed. A long upper lip nuzzled tentatively at one of the sacks of oats, but the mouth of it was tied hard and fast. Then her mouth was pressed hard against the burlap until a fold of it was between her teeth. Slowly the sack was swung aloft.

Lisbeth turned softly and carried the oat sack some twenty feet away where she deposited it lightly upon the snow. Placing one small front foot on it firmly she surged back with her teeth. There was a rending, ripping sound and the oat sack gaped open with an eighteen-inch slit in the middle. Lisbeth's jaws were rammed straight into the sack as far as she could possibly crowd them. When she lifted her head her mouth was so full of oats that it could not possibly contain them and as she swung her head around to regard the bed she sowed oats in a thick half circle.

She stopped crunching abruptly. One of the men in bed had suddenly rolled over and lifted his head. Had the fellow sighted her Lisbeth would have been shot without further ceremony, but it was the horses who, perhaps, saved her. With better eye-sight than the man they had seen what was going on and the tearing of the sack carried full knowledge to them. Hungry as they were they began to move and stamp impatiently. Apparently satisfied that it was only the uneasiness of the horses that had disturbed him the man resumed his rest.

Then, in utter silence save for the steady crunching of her strong but aged jaws, Lisbeth ate as she had not eaten for many days. Strength came back to her with amazing rapidity. Occasionally the folds of the depleted sack got in her way and she worried it this way and that until she could get at the oats. No thought of the morrow troubled her, for after all Lisbeth was a mule and economic foresight is not a mulish gift. No more did her conscience prick her for robbing the all-but-starving horses.

Presently that sack of oats was empty. Most of its contents had been scattered and trampled deep into the snow, and Lisbeth was still unsatisfied. More boldly now than she had approached before, she made her way to the pack saddles, lifted and despoiled the remaining sack as she had done the first. But when it was finally empty Lisbeth had eaten all that she cared to. She wondered furtively whether she should not investigate the men's grub supply where it reposed by the dead ashes of their camp fire.

Had she been the least bit hungry at the time she would have made her exploration thorough, but as it was she was content to tumble things about in the snow promiscuously. Then her innate caution was awakened and she withdrew some distance back the way she had come.

With renewed life and vigor she deviated somewhat from the trail and forced her way resolutely under one of the great, bent over willow bushes. At last she had found a dry place and one that was sheltered from the wind. With a sigh of content she lay down.

She was awakened presently by the blood-chilling, melancholy howling of a wolf pack, one that undoubtedly had followed the trail of the outlaws out of the mountains. It was close at hand, and there was such a ferocious note of baffled rage in their cry that Lisbeth leaped to her feet and stood shivering. But she did not leave her shelter, and presently when the clamor subsided she lay down again.

Daybreak found three furious outlaws rendering the air with profanity while they contemplated the torn, empty oat sacks and their own scattered, soaked grub. They could gather up their grub, and they did; finding it wet but still eatable. But it was hopeless to think of gathering up the oats that Lisbeth had wasted, and oats were more important to them than their own food. Their horses were in a half starving condition already, and now they had nothing whatever to feed them.

"It was that ——, miserable, camp-robbin' ole skate of a white mule that done this. Look at them tracks," raged one of the outlaws.

It was true that the evidence admitted of no doubt as to who the guilty party had been.

"—— if I don't shoot her right now," the same outlaw swore, but the man who led the party intervened.

"Don't fly off the han'le," that man admonished. "This here is serious; we got to decide what to do."

"Well, I was goin' t' do somethin'," the other retorted angrily.

"It leaves us in one —— of a predicament," the leader went on, unheeding the other's burst of temper. "If we go on after Cheney, an' he's got any lead at all on us these scads'll give out on us. They'll never be able t' reach Fort Hall even if you cared to go there, an' every mile we go after Cheney takes us that much farther from Dutchy's."

He looked at his two partners, now suddenly sobered by his blunt statement of the case, and as they offered no suggestions he continued:

"Far as I'm concerned I'd like the fun of knockin' Cheney on the head an' appropriatin' that dust, but I ain't cravin' to die of starvation, or freezin' to death. The best thing we can do is line out for Dutchy's. We'll make these horses take us as far as they can an' then we'll have to go the rest of the way on foot."

The other outlaws saw the futility of arguing the point. They agreed readily enough with the leader, but the one who had made threats against Lisbeth started down the trail after her. At the place where she had left it he stopped and scanned the snow for sight of her and overlooked her hiding place.

"——," he said, "I just as well let her starve t' death or let the wolves take her as t' wade through that snow."

A half hour later the outlaws went on across the island and turned north toward the hang-out of their friend Dutchy. And Alex Cheney, struggling along to the south, never knew that he was spared being overtaken by his enemies only by the despoiling of two sacks of oats by Lisbeth.

AS FOR Lisbeth herself she watched the men out of sight and then she returned to their camp. She was more thirsty than she was hungry and she began to wolf down great mouthfuls of snow where the oats had been spilled. With each mouthful she obtained a few oats, and by the time her thirst was slaked she was not particularly hungry.

She pawed and nosed about the campground for fifteen or twenty minutes, then suddenly her head went up and her skin began to grow cold. A quarter of a mile back the baffled wolf pack had sighted her and sounded the hunting cry. The pack was hungry, for the unprecedented hard winter had spoiled their hunting. There was fury and determination in their deep baying, and written plain in their little, fierce, blood-shot eyes.

In sudden dread Lisbeth realized her aloneness and turned and fled. The leader

The pack was scarcely two hundred yards behind, and his followers, seven in number, more strung along behind. Her flight brought a louder, more exultant note into the pack cry. She fairly dived under the bent-over willow that had sheltered her before. Instantly she spun around and faced her enemies.

She had short time to wait. The leader of the pack was wisely skirting the trail she had made and staying on the crust. Without hesitation he threw himself into the trail and dashed head-long under the willow bush after his victim. Lisbeth squealed in terror, and then her right front foot shot up in the air. The smoothly worn iron shoe glinted in the air like silver and then it came down squarely on top of the wolf's head, smashing his skull like an egg-shell.

The leader lay flattened and harmless before the next wolf arrived and, seeing him thus, confidence came back to the old white mule in a rush. She was better prepared for the next one when he bolted in, but her last blow was only a glancing one. The wolf whined with pain and sprang for her throat. She reared until her ears struck the roof of her willow shed, and both feet drove downward upon the wolf's back, He went down, crippled and helpless. Again and again she struck, and the other wolves, now aware that they had a battle on their hands, slid to a stop, snarling and snapping, the foam driveling from their slavering jaws.

They encircled her and a wolf launched an attack from the rear to ham-string her. Lisbeth doubled herself into a knot and lashed out with both hind feet. The wolf was kicked twenty feet, as dead as the two leaders of the pack. Some of them climbed to the top of the willow shed in an attempt to reach her back. At first the thick crust of the snow resisted them, but they began to gnaw through it. Then, suddenly, it gave way and a heavy wolf dropped through the snow onto the sprangled willows, which gave him no footing, nor yet parted enough to let him through. He gave a startled yelp of fear and fought and clambered until he had got back to safety. His struggles had caused the others to withdraw, and with a sudden rush they all attacked the body of the wolf Lisbeth had kicked out on the snow.

It was nearly dark when they returned to the siege of Lisbeth. But their stomachs were full and none of them had the hardihood to brave those death-dealing feet. Lisbeth moved constantly so that she could watch both openings. She could hear them for a while snarling and snapping over the remnants of the carcass of the dead wolf on the outside and then the sounds grew more remote. But not once during the long night did her vigilance relax.

Morning came and there was no sign of the wolf pack. With the keen edge of their hunger taken off they had withdrawn toward the mountains from which they had been lured by the outlaws. With a disdainful sniff at the bodies of the two dead wolves which had been with her all night she stepped from her shelter and gazed around. She sensed at once a change in the weather. It had turned warmer, and soft, fleecy clouds were floating lightly through a sky that was no longer hard as brass.

She was thirsty and she went back to the camp-ground and again absorbed snow and scattered grains of oats. At last, feeling well satisfied, she headed her aged body down the trail toward the second-growth willows. The farther toward the lower end of the island she got the more tender were the willow shoots. Finally she found a frozen-over swamp where the bulrushes were so tall that they stood two feet above the ice. By breaking the crust with her feet and pawing a little she was able to reach the frozen rushes.

EARLY in the spring Alex Cheney came north with a new wagon-train loaded with freight for Timber City. He had used his last cartridge to shoot a huge snow-shoe rabbit that had lasted him until he struck an Indian village on the banks of the Snake. Here he had obtained food enough to get him to Fort Hall. There the soldiers had grub-staked him and he reached Salt Lake the thirtieth day of December—in time to save his business.

"I left ole Lisbeth on an island somewhere off here to the right," he told his wagon boss as they came back. "I've a notion to go over an' see where she died. If the wolves ain't eat her I'll bury her. If ever a mule deserved a decent burial Lisbeth does."

The wagon boss laughed, but Alex was determined, and while the train stopped for dinner the two of them rode over to the island. They found it no hard matter to cross to the island and after a little difficulty Alex discovered his saddle.

"Look here!" he ejaculated suddenly, "somebody's had a fire right here, an' there's oats scattered around. I never built a fire, an' I know —— well, I never had no oats."

More than ever interested the men began to look around. Cheney rightfully guessed that it was the outlaws who had camped there, and he wondered what they had done to Lisbeth—if anything. Presently the wagon boss let out a yell and hurrying over Alex found him contemplating the skeletons of three dead wolves. There were other signs there yet that could not be mistaken.

"By ——, if ole Lisbeth didn't kill them wolves I'm a liar," Alex marveled.

And presently a new thought began to occupy his mind. It was unreasonable in the extreme to think that the old mule had survived. Even a strong young mule would have perished early in the winter, but Lisbeth—was Lisbeth.

"—— me if I don't take time to look around till I find out what's become her," he asserted firmly.

"Hey! Look!" exclaimed the wagon boss. "What's that comin'?"

It was Lisbeth, her curiosity aroused by the sound of voices. She was gaunt and scrawny. Her hip bones projected dismally. But on she stepped forward briskly as she recognized Alex. There were tears in Cheney's eyes as he threw his arms about the old mule's neck.

"I wouldn't 'a' thought she could 'a' made it—at her age," gaped the wagon boss.

"Look there," said Cheney sternly, but with a kindly, tear-dimmed twinkle in his eye. He turned Lisbeth so that her right side was toward them. On its white side face, dim but still readable, was this legend in black tar:

I'M OLD BUT I'M AWFULL TOUGH

Slants on LIFE

by Bill Adams

BITTERSWEET

I

FOR the love of Pete don't say "Bill Adams says" unless you prefix it with "That —— fool Bill Adams says," or words to that effect. What I mean to express is the fact that what I may happen to say is not of any consequence. I loathe people who have that infernal habit of laying down the law. I detest the self-sufficient folk who are so eternally cock-sure of themselves, and so keen and ready to tell the rest of us just how to live, to think, and in general how to conduct ourselves to make the old world better.

I think it is a pretty good old world for all of its sin and sorrow; and it is my own belief that, if there be above us all a Father, He is a quiet minded Overseer who has less patience with the serene and self-satisfied than with those of his children who are forever falling and yet still in their hearts willing to climb to the difficult heights.

I ought not to say "I hate—" yet, I am inclined to hate all preaching and all preachers.

II

I THINK that there are men who are dead to beauty, for a time. I have been there myself. I've staggered home at midnight and before dawn, from the orchards, sick from hydro-cyanic-acid gas, night after night with nothing to look forward to but the same thing tomorrow night, after a day of tossing on a sweat-wet bed in July heat. I've worked till I was far too tired to care whether the sun set in gold or behind a blackness. One can get so weary that one shuts one's whole soul up and is merely an animal. All one longs for is sleep and rest—one gets to think of food, of sleep, of a day off, and beyond that of nothing.

I don't think that evil, or vice of any sort ever quite kill the love of lovely things in the mind of man. Men will always exclaim at a great beauty, no matter how low they have sunken.

The thing that kills the knowledge of beauty in our souls is not the world's common evil; but the inhumanity of man to his brother man.

PARDS

A Five-Part Story—Part III

by

Hugh Pendexter

Author of "The Bush Lopers," "The Homesteaders, etc.

The first part of the story briefly retold in story form

FRANK ELLIS woke up one bright morning in California Gulch to find himself a total failure. Through the winter of 1862 he had trailed from one holding to another until the gold mining season was at a close. He was penniless, and he had a sister back east who believed him a great success. There was nothing left for him to do but take a job over the lunch counter of the Great Western Hotel, under the hand of George Skillings, boss.

As he was serving his first meal to a group of miners, traders and mine employees, he unconsciously burst into a plaintive song.

"Stop that —— racket," the boss roared.

From that time on he was the "Singing Pilgrim."

The Pilgrim became a drawing card. Nate Goss, the gambler; "Rabbit," the Indian, doomed to death by his tribe on a charge of killing a brother tribesman; "Ancient Days," an old-time placer miner; "Bones," a man with a delusion of great prehistoric beasts in the gulches—all fell into the lure of the Pilgrim's voice.

"Whip King," reputed to be the best wagon train boss between the River and the coast, arrived in the gulch with a startling crack of his monstrous whip. He had no special destination, no special enemies, and he cared little for firearms. But he proved to be the friend of many restless men who fought constantly. Many was the time that his long lash sent men, armed with six-shooters, cowering in the corner.

With the season almost ended and too many men finding almost no gold, things in California Gulch became a bit thick. Goss had a fight with Charlie Dodge, the monte gambler, as a result of unfair play, and finally the Pilgrim fought with his boss. The fight itself was inconsequential, but a threat loomed in the background when the Pilgrim swore vengeance.

That night Skillings, the boss, was found with a knife in his heart, and the Singing Pilgrim was missing from California Gulch.

EXAMINATION of Skillings' effects brought to light counterfeit money amounting to twenty thousand dollars. The mob, almost in a frenzy, shouted—

"Hang the Pilgrim! Hang the Singing Pilgrim!"

And added to this they accused Goss of being implicated in the counterfeiting gang, giving him a chance of leaving town immediately or risking the circumstances if he stayed. He left.

With the aid of Rabbit, the Pilgrim stole away in the night, an innocent outcast. For many days they wandered, until the Pilgrim lost the Rabbit when pursued by the Utes, the tribe of Indians to which the Rabbit belonged. Certain death threatened the Pilgrim. He was saved miraculously by the reappearance of Rabbit, whom the tribe worshipped as a god, calling him, the "Walking Dead Man."

An outcast by the name of Lomsom who had affiliated himself with the tribe also came into the camp. Trouble began anew. By mistake the Pilgrim and Lomsom went into the sacred medicine tent to smoke a pipe of tobacco out of the rain. The Indians found them there, and in his excitement, the Pilgrim put a small idol in his pocket which he had in his hand at the time of the Indians' entrance.

The discovery of the loss of the idol put the camp in a turmoil, the Pilgrim was again accused and threatened with death. Court was held, and Rabbit promised that the idol would be restored with the release of the Pilgrim. He was unsuccessful, and only through greath stealth and cunning did the Pilgrim finally escape from the camp of his enemies.

"Pards," copyright, 1925, by Hugh Pendexter.

ELLIS sat up and stared helplessly.

"My name's Potts. Did you steal that hoss?" quietly asked the fat man.

Speaking rapidly Ellis explained his capture by the Utes and how he had ridden the horse in escaping from the camp. Potts heard him through, then shook his head and sighed:

"Too bad! You was awake and heard our talk. I knew when you woke up. You had time to think up a decent lie, and you had to tell that fool story. Injuns! Bah! My speaking of Injuns put that notion into your head."

"You can hang me but I can't change my story. It's true."

"Hang you? Of course we'll hang you. Got to do it after hearing that yarn," mumbled Potts, his hand resting on the butt of a revolver thrust through the waist-band of his rough trousers. "No getting around that. But so long as you're asleep I'm going out and take a look at the weather. The boys will be here soon. But do you know what I'd do if I was a hossthief and bound down the valley?

"I'd take that batch of bread and a couple blankets and travel afoot about seven miles below Cache creek and across the log bridge to the east side and make over the spur, some eight or twelve hundred feet high and get down into South Park. The trail splits about five miles from the Salt Works. I think I'd go to the salt works, instead of south to Cañon City. Then twenty miles north to Fair Play, where I'd be within three days of Denver, where all —— couldn't locate me. Yes, I think I'd do that. And I'm sure, if I was as young a hossthief as you, I'd quit that kind of work and earn an honest living."

With this amazing speech he rose and waddled from the room, turning sideways to scrape through the doorway. Ellis recovered his wits and snatched up the saleratus bread and two blankets and darted from the hut. Beyond knowing he was traveling down the valley and that he was fearfully afraid of meeting some of the boys he never had any clear recollection of his flight. He remembered seeing a light which must have been at Tabor's old diggings—Granite City—and that below this point the valley was suddenly compressed until there was scarcely room for river and road.

It was black in the cañon and he was blundering around rocky hills, feeling his way down, down until he expected to walk into the river, then again mounting steep slopes. Finally the wide spread of stars told him the valley had broadened, and he began to realize that the round-faced man who believed him to be a thief, not only had permitted him to escape but had misled the posse, for there was no sound of pursuit. He floundered into an area of fallen pines, and fearing to wandering farther in the night he rolled in his blankets and waited for light.

He slept poorly, the fear of pursuit arousing him frequently from bad dreams. He rose before daybreak and discovered his bed had been at the foot of a high wall of gray rock. Every muscle ached and he was sorely tempted to build a fire, but was restrained by fear of the fat man's contempt were he captured again. Rolling his blankets he crouched low in the brush and ate some of his poor bread. The sun was just rising when he resumed his journey. He had advanced but a short distance before he came to a creek, running waist-high. Without any hesitation he held his blankets on top of his head and plunged in.

The valley was open and no longer rough and broken. He had an excellent view of the Sawatch Range, one peak of which was painful to gaze at as its coat of snow reflected the early sun. He tried to walk some warmth into his lower limbs but succeeded poorly. On beholding a long log house he turned from the road and, reckless of consequences, boldly approached it. Near the house was a patch of wheat. A ditch for irrigating had been started from the river; all this surprised him. A man came out and greeted him.

"*Bon jour, M'sieu.* You come from de mine. You come on de foot."

Ellis replied he was from the diggings at Frying Pan Gulch at the foot of Mount Massive, was destitute and compelled to travel afoot. And could he enter and dry his clothes?

"By gar! You wet lak' de beaver. I mus' work. Every t'ing inside. Help yourself to. You eat de meat in de kettle. You eat your —— head off. Joe White feed a t'ousand men dis summer, almos'."

And with a flourishing bow the lone rancher hurried away to his wheat field and left Ellis in possession.

Not only meat was awaiting him but so half a pot of strong coffee. When Ellis had eaten and drank and dried his clothes he felt like a new man. But he felt ashamed when he observed how he had lowered the kettle and had exhausted the coffee. He stepped to the door but could see no signs of his kind host. As a slight appreciation he left a dollar on the table before taking to the road.

Clouds were gathering over the Sawatch Range. Reinvigorated, Ellis traveled rapidly. The valley was nearly level, cut only by shallow gullies. On his left was the spur that separated the Arkansas from the heads of the South Platte. This was the barrier he must cross. It was a low range and sparsely timbered, and yet repelling because of the slopes of bare and broken rock.

Two miles of brisk walking brought him to a stout bridge of logs. The Arkansas at this point was the width of a Maine river near its head. The current however was swift and foaming, and he rejoiced he was not compelled to ford it.

Once on the east side of the river he sensed an unwarranted security, as if the bridge were an insurmountable barrier to all pursuit. The road also was more pleasing, at least for the next two miles; for it passed through grassy meadows and along scattered groves. Foliage was painted for the last mad dance with the fierce winds.

The clouds over the western range refrained from advancing. Somehow Ellis felt an uplift of spirit, but he glanced around guiltily on discovering he was humming a song. Goss had warned at their parting that if he were ever identified as the man wanted in California Gulch it would be by his singing voice and not by name.

The way left the gracious meadows behind and gradually mounted the slopes. From bench to bench he plodded along, and then found the trail abruptly entering what proved to be a narrow, winding gulch. To the southeast was the beginning of the Great Cañon of the Arkansas. With the first turn in the gulch road the valley vanished as if some mountain god had drawn a curtain behind the traveler.

And as abruptly the scenery changed. A land of gnomes replaced the pleasing meadows and groves. On each side were enormous pyramids. The hills were masses of dark red boulders. Many of these were grotesquely arranged as if cyclopean children had played at building castles and had commenced innumerable gigantic structures, and, tiring of the game, had finished none. Blocks of red stone, twenty or forty feet thick, were balanced on fantastic piles of similar blocks.

Some of the tremendous architecture suggested a budding military genius, for Ellis frequently saw what looked to be forts with mountains for bastions and ranges for broken ramparts. Wherever the lonely traveler directed his gaze there was the same gigantic, eccentric arrangement of monstrous ruins.

Occasional clumps of small pines were all that varied this chaos until the cactus began to appear. The whole effect on Ellis was that of savagery. He began to be afraid of Nature as he plodded along mile after mile. He stared furtively behind him and to each side as if fearing to behold the ancient triceratops, the last of the dinosaurs, stalking him from behind some of the weird formations.

After entering the hills he traveled eight miles without discovering any suggestion of a dividing range. He no longer feared pursuit by mortals. California Gulch and the menace he had fled from were as remote as the moon. But he did fear he might die of exposure and starvation in this desolate, unreal land. He sank deeper in despair as he came to yet another ridge, higher than any he had mounted.

He plunged through the thin timber at its base and climbed the slope. He expected to behold another barrier, once he gained the naked crest. Nearly exhausted by his efforts he halted on the bare top and muttered aloud in relief on seeing that the road sloped downward as far as the eye could reach.

Then he ventured to look back, and for several minutes was held motionless by the wonderful panorama stretched below him. In the immediate foreground were tops of hills and the innumerable turrets and pyramids he had conquered. Defects in architecture were erased; the illusion was perfect. And beyond and below these was the world of men. All that the first bend in the gulch had snatched from his view was now restored, softened and beautified. The valley of the Arkansas, several miles in width, appeared to be as smooth as a floor. There were no shallow gullies, no raw earth discords. The stretches of sage plains were a silver mist, and appeared to be translucent. The course of the river and its tributaries were cleanly pricked out by the fairy fringe of timber, and from the divide the timber was wonderfully sky-blue in color. For the background there was the Sawatch Range, hooded with clouds of ebony except where one snowy peak thrust its head into the glorious sunlight.

Stretching down toward South Park was a long and beautiful valley. He hastened down to this, believing the worst of his journey was behind him. On crossing it he came to a low ridge, which had not shown from the divide. Once he mounted this he knew he was at last entering South Park.

Now he dared to halt and build a fire and eat the last of his poor bread and slice of meat he had brought from the Frenchman's place. It was late afternoon when he paused. Before he realized it the sun was gone and darkness was blurring the road. He dragged himself to his feet and limped on. He came to where the road split, one fork leading to the Salt Works, five miles away, the other to Cañon City. Without the sun he did not discover the branching of the road and having lost all sense of direction he traveled down the right hand path. The round-faced man had said five miles of walking would take him to the Salt Works. He held on for two hours before he suspected he had lost his way. When he finally halted it was before the mouth of a lonely gulch. Discouraged, and faint from exhaustion, he set about making a fire of deadwood, determined to camp on the road until someone came along to tell him where he was.

HE SOON had a blaze crackling, but had barely seated himself on his blankets than he was alarmed by a stone rattling down the wall of the gulch. He jumped to his feet, fearing a bear was coming to investigate. A deep voice demanded—

"Who's that down there?"

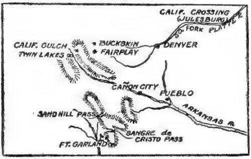
Much relieved to hear a human voice, Ellis loudly replied—

"A miner from up the Arkansas Valley bound for the Salt Works."

Discordant laughter greeted this response, and the stones rolled and rattled more rapidly as the unseen descended to the road.

"You're walking right away from the Salt Works. Must have taken the wrong turn," informed the man as he came into the light of the fire.

Ellis decided the stranger would be a fit denizen of the upland country among the red pyramids and castles. For he stood more than six feet in height and would weigh considerably over two hundred. But it was his countenance rather than his bulk that suggested wildness and savagery. The forehead was low and the eyes small and deep-set. A thick black beard covered most of the face and reached nearly to the waist. Ellis felt repelled by the man's appearance.



"Come along to my hut," invited the man in a hoarse voice. "Likely to have a big rain before morning."

"But where am I? What's this spot called?" asked Ellis.

"You're on the road to Cañon City, five miles from where you took the wrong turn. The little gulch making off the road ain't got any regular name. Side I come down from is called Warder's Hill. I'm the warder."

And he indulged in more of his uncomfortable laughter. Then he continued:

"I'm Jonathan Leaper. My cabin's up the gulch a ways. I'm kept busy rescuing fool miners who lose themselves. If you want rest and food come along. Not another cabin in twenty miles except at the Salt Works, and that's ten miles from here."

"I can't walk another mile," groaned Ellis.

"Don't have to. Welcome to my cabin."

"Thanks. I'll be glad to take shelter with you. I can pay for my keep," said Ellis.

"You fellers who strike it rich can pay for anything you hanker for," boomed the deep voice.

"But I haven't struck it rich," hastily

assured Ellis. "But I'm not flat busted."

"Of course not," rumbled Leaper. "Follow me."

As he led the way up the gulch he broke into wilder laughter several times. For half a mile they followed the narrow twisting way. Ellis limped wearily, and more than once stumbled over the rocks, for the high walls shut out the starlight. Leaper moved confidently and showed great familiarity with the rough way. Occasionally he would warn, "Boulder here" or, "I'm turning to the left." At last a bend in the path brought them in sight of a light.

Leaper came to a halt, and in a deep bass growled:

"Some one's making mighty free with my place. Stay here till I have a look."

Although a very large man, he moved with the stealth of a cat in gaining the small window. Ellis sat down and began to feel drowsy. He would have gone to sleep had not Leaper returned and aroused him, saying:

"Get up. I know the feller. For a mighty good reason you'll let on you're a busted miner and ain't got two bits to your name. Rough folks in these parts."

As he spoke he slipped a hand under Ellis' elbow and helped him along to the low door and kicked it open.

Ellis blinked his eyes in the light thrown off from the fireplace and became wide awake on beholding Bill Waggle standing in a corner, a six-shooter half raised. Waggle recognized Leaper at once and put up his gun, and with a broad grin began:

"Knew it must be you, Jonathan, but wasn't taking no chances. What the ——! The Singing Pilgrim or I'm a liar!"

Leaper darted suspicious glances at the two and commanded:

"Shut up, Bill. Folks'll hear you down in Cañon City. Sonny, you lay down in the corner till I git something to eat. Of course this man's a pilgrim, Bill. And he's unfortunate and is traveling alone and afoot."

Waggle laughed without making any sound and informed:

"But he's lucky to be alive. Used to sing for his victuals in California Gulch. Tried to rob Skillings and killed him. Joke was he didn't find anything to steal but counterfeit money. They're looking for this feller."

Leaper slowly combed his fingers through a tangle in his beard and inquired—

"Any reward?"

Waggle shook his head and reminded:

"Skillings wa'n't liked well enough for that. The gulch wants him so's it can stretch his neck for passing counterfeit money."

"I didn't kill Skillings! I know nothing about any counterfeit money!" hotly cried Ellis.

"Of course you didn't," rumbled Leaper. "And you wouldn't be given up to be stretched if there was ten thousand dollars on your head."

Waggle laughed noiselessly and inquired— "Where's that skunk of a Goss?"

"He isn't a skunk. He's my friend," defended Ellis in a faint voice as he collapsed on the blankets in the corner. "Don't call names to me that you never would dare speak to him. He ran your friend Charley Dodge out of the gulch."

Waggle showed his teeth in a snarl and warned:

"Don't you talk uppity to me, you young pup. That cold-deck gambler can't run me out of a camp. Where is he?"

"Don't know. You ran like a deer after he gave Dodge his needings."

"By ——! I don't take that talk from nobody on earth," shouted Waggle, reaching for his gun.

Leaper exploded in one of his terrible laughing spells and snatched up an ax and lowered at Waggle. The latter hesitated for a second, then folded his arms and assured:

"I ain't mussing up your cabin, Jonathan. But this youngster wants to keep a civil tongue in his teeth."

"Don't talk to him," roared Leaper. "You know it's bad to git me started."

And he toyed with the ax suggestively. Then he told Ellis:

"You take a nap, Singing Pilgrim, or whatever your name is. I'll wake you when grub's ready."

Believing Leaper had cowed Waggle, and with sleep resting an iron hand on his head, Ellis sank back on the blankets and closed his eyes. Once he roused for a moment, or long enough to hear Leaper's rumbling voice warn:

"Let be. You can't play any game here. And you'd better be going."

WHEN next he opened his eyes it was dark outside and Leaper was kindling a fire. As the flames flared Ellis gazed about the low room and for a moment believed the meeting with Waggle was a dream. Leaper heard him move and swiftly turned his huge head, and informed:

"Waggle's gone. Turned him out. He's too peppery. I'll have coffee ready soon and the beans warmed up. Go back to sleep if you want to. It's two hours to sunrise."

"I feel mighty lame and sore but not sleepy," said Ellis, crawling from the blankets and sitting on a stool. "Wish I could buy a horse, a cheap one. Got one you'd sell?"

The sunken eyes flickered with little white lights.

"I haven't any hoss."

Ellis was disappointed.

"I can foot it, I suppose. No supposing about it. I must foot it."

"I haven't a hoss," Leaper repeated, "but I've got a mule. Onery critter, but so much stock's being stolen by white thieves and Injuns I don't dast keep anything on four legs except the mule."

"If he can carry me to Denver by the way of the Salt Works and Fair Play I'll give you fifty for him. That would leave me something for grub in Denver until I can get work."

Leaper's wild laughter would have alarmed Ellis if not for the accompanying assurance:

"You'll need all your money and I'll need the mule. But I'll lend you the mule as far as the Salt Works. Leave him there for me to call for. You'll be rested by that time and can foot it the rest of the way or catch a ride down to Denver. Wagons going down pretty thick. So Waggle thinks you killed Skillings, eh?"

"I don't know what he thinks. He's a scoundrel. I never harmed Skillings. I was asleep in Nate Goss' cabin when it happened. An Indian hunter woke me up and told me I must run for it. He took me away. I've been sorry ever since I went with him. Goss said it was the worst thing I could have done."

"I ain't staying awake nights loving Bill Waggle or his brother," said Leaper. "As for Skillings, his cashing in ain't nó loss. I'd only think better of you if I knew you did for him."

"I had no more to do with his death than you did," insisted Ellis.

"Was you yarning when you said Goss run Dodge out of camp?" curiously asked Leaper.

"If Dodge hadn't been wearing a stove cover over his heart he'd died in his tracks."

Leaper offered to make no more conversation. He busied himself with the breakfast, and by the time the coffee and beans were ready the rocky gulch outside began to reveal itself. Ellis talked as they ate but the warder of Warder's Hill did not appear to hear him. When they finished the meal the tops of the gulch walls were touched by the first sunlight. Ellis reminded his silent host that he was anxious to be going.

Without a word Leaper opened the door and led the way to a natural corral formed by a recess in the rocks. In this was the mule The fallen trunk of a pine blocked the opening. Pulling the tree aside Leaper entered and from a niche in the rocks pulled out the wreck of a saddle and fastened it to the scrawny animal. Then he turned and motioned for Ellis to join him and mount.

Ellis entered the enclosure and remarked:

"You're too kind, Mr. Leaper. At least let me pay for the grub and the use of the mule. And you've forgotten the bridle."

"This critter's trained," hoarsely muttered Leaper. "You'll drive him without a bridle."

"I don't understand. How?" exclaimed Ellis.

Leaper darted forward a huge hand and clutched Ellis by the throat and held a revolver at his head and roared:

"You young dog! Pay? You're mighty high! You're not the first fool to pay toll to the warder of Warder's Hill. Put your hands up!"

Stupefied, Ellis obeyed. Leaper released his hold on the throat and rapidly searched him. He found no weapons, but when he fished out the money he went into an ecstasy of savage mirth.

"——! What a joke on Bill Waggle!" he yelled.

He deftly yanked Ellis' hands behind him and made them fast. Then he lifted his victim into the saddle and passed a rope from ankle to ankle under the mule so he could not fall, nor roll off.

"What are you going to do with me?" whispered Ellis.

"Nothing!" cried Leaper. "I'm lending

you a mule. You're leaving your money to warrantee return of the critter. Ain't I ind?"

He burst into mighty cachinations. Suddenly he ceased his ferocious laughing and tore a limb from the fallen tree and savagely struck Ellis several times over the head and shoulders. The mule jumped and kicked. Driving the animal from the corral Leaper headed him up the gulch and belabored him with the bough and sent him galloping madly among and over the rocks.

CHAPTER VI

DIFFERENT DANGERS

UP THE gulch raced the mule. Ellis yelled in fear. The first bend took mount and rider out of sight of Leaper and the cabin. The mule suddenly forgot the blows and turned abruptly at right angles and clambered like a mountain sheep up the rough slope to a little shelf of grass and fell to grazing. Only the thong tied to his ankles kept Ellis from leaving the saddle when the mule shifted his course. As it was, he lurched far to one side and felt as if he was broken in two at the waist. Only by the greatest effort did he regain an upright position.

Absolutely helpless, Ellis surrendered to fate and dully waited for the mule to cease grazing and kill him by toppling over some declivity, or by dragging him to death after causing the saddle to slip and roll. When the mule lifted his head and pricked his long ears and looked at the rocks above the grass-plot Ellis believed Leaper had followed to finish him. He beheld a battered hat slowly rising above a boulder, then a face, a face wearing a scrubby beard.

"Thank God!" weakly cried Ellis, scarcely daring to believe his eyes. "Hi! Come here and cut me loose."

The stranger placed a finger to his lips and studied the rough course of the gulch for a few moments. Then he emerged from behind the boulder and scrambled down to the shelf. He had a ragged blanket and a battered coffee-pot strapped on his back; and his boots were broken, exposing his toes. He was a thoroughly disreputable appearing man, one of the many derelicts ever drifting about the camps.

But he was beautiful to Ellis. The mule, however, did not fancy the newcomer, or else feared a return to the rocky corral. With a flirt of his heels he plunged headlong down the slope, nearly breaking the rider's back. The ragged man followed. The mule headed up the gulch and slowed to a walk and jerked his head from side to side in search for another grazing ground. The stranger clumped after him, gradually gaining ground. When almost within reach, the mule discovered him and was off at a bouncing gallop.

The man pulled a revolver from his boot and, still walking, followed. Satisfied with his lead the mule walked sedately. Ellis looked back despairingly, and feared the stranger would tire of his helpful purpose. Beholding the revolver Ellis begged—

"Shoot! I'll risk anything."

The man waved his hand and from under his ragged coat produced a small coil of rope and made a noose in one end. Then he swung off to one side and climbed above the floor of the gulch and pressed on, sometimes in sight and often hid by boulders. When abreast of the mule he disappeared. The mule continued at a walk for a few rods, then broke into a trot and headed for a patch of grass. There was no sign of the stranger and Ellis decided he had given up the chase. The mule halted and grazed greedily.

A shrill whistle caused Ellis to start nervously and brought the mule's head up with a jerk: and from a near-by rock shot the noosed rope and encircled the brute's neck. Madly excited and wildly exultant Ellis sounded a sharp yell. But the battle was not won. The mule jumped and backed violently, crushing Ellis' legs against boulders and all but killing him before the insistence of the noose won the fight. When the mule fell to his knees Ellis slumped forward on his neck like a bag of meal; nor could he straighten up.

The man closed in by shortening the rope, and Ellis glimpsed a knife in his left hand. The mule made a final effort and went back on his knees.

"Slide off!" commanded the stranger. "Your feet are free."

Ellis' feet and legs were numb and he had not known when the thong was severed. He threw himself to one side and rolled to the ground. The man kept the rope taut and ordered him to get clear of the maddened brute. With no sense of feeling in his legs and with his hands tied at his back, Ellis could only accomplish this maneuver by rolling.

The man loosened the noose a bit and allowed the mule to stagger to his feet. Near by was a piñon, and the stranger led the half-choked animal to this and fastened the rope to a bushy branch. Then he ran to Ellis and released his hands.

"You were in a bad fix, pardner," he commented.

"I was in ——," feebly answered Ellis, sitting up and rubbing his benumbed legs and ankles. "I was going crazy with the thought of the death I must die. If you hadn't happened along——"

It was too horrible to finish.

The man laughed softly and corrected:

"I didn't happen. I came on purpose. You're the second man Jonathan Leaper has given a ride within two weeks. It's his love of cruelty that will undo him. Usually a man enters this gulch and is never seen or heard of again. But I've got the other feller ready to give evidence, and you make the second witness. Now I'll put him where he belongs. What's your name?"

"Frank Ellis. Got lost. Met him on the Cañon City road. Stayed at his cabin over night. This morning he robbed me of my money and roped me to that beast."

"It couldn't have happened better. My name's Farnham. Live at Buckskin. United States marshal. Leaper's been playing his games for two seasons. He never troubles any one going up to the mines. Gives them food and shelter. But he catches them coming back when they come alone. If it hadn't been for his ——'s liking to torture a victim by tieing him to a mule he might never have been suspected.

"Few people notice when a man disappears out here. Coming and going all the time. No house within twenty miles of this gulch except the one at the Salt Works. Men are strangers to each other, and no one's concerned over what happens to a stranger.

"But about two weeks ago Leaper played the mule trick on a man who had a thousand in nuggets and was riding a fine mule. Turned him loose on the mule. It was two days before the fellow was rescued. Man chopping wood quite a few miles from here happened along. And he had to risk killing the rider by shooting the mule through the head. Then I got into the game. The man's evidence explained several disappearances last season and this."

"I'm awfully obliged. What will we do next?" asked Ellis, his anger flaring up as he thought of his money.

"Keep low till tonight, then sneak down to the cabin. If he's alone I'll get him."

"There was a man there part of last night," informed Ellis. "Bill Waggle."

"You know Waggle?" curiously asked Farnham.

"Only by sight."

"Just where were you hailing from when you met Leaper?"

"Frying Pan Gulch," lied Ellis.

"Heard about a killing up in California Gulch, I suppose?"

"Heard about several. Some one is shooting or knifing some one else up there right along, I guess," replied Ellis.

He began to feel nervous under the examination.

"I referred to a hotel keeper. Man named Skillings."

"I don't remember that name."

"Well, my first job is to nail Leaper and take him to Denver. We'll keep the mule tied up here and wait till dark. And we must watch to see if Leaper is curious how your ride came out and wanders up this way."

Ellis felt much relieved to have the questions cease. He was sorry he had volunteered any information about Waggle. He dreaded the possibility of an interview between Leaper and the marshal for Waggle had told the former about Skillings' death and the camp's suspicion as to the slayer. He began to believe he had escaped immediate death only to be faced by a murder charge in a Denver court.

Farnham shifted the position of the mule so he could graze in a patch of thin grass, and led the way up among the rocks, where they could discover Leaper, should he venture up the gulch.

Time passed slowly. Ellis reclined on his back and watched the blue sky and speculated on his fate. He heartily wished he had risked remaining at Twin Lakes until Goss was able to travel.

Farnham was intent on studying the gulch floor and the sloping walls. Finally he began to talk, and he told Ellis something of the criminal trail that extended from New Mexico to Denver and the mountain camps. He declared his belief that

Leaper's cabin was one of the wayside stations for horsethieves, stage robbers, counterfeiters and other lawless men.

He also was convinced that Leaper was half mad and worked entirely alone in robbing wayfarers. Afraid that this recital would terminate in more questions, such as how he came to know Waggle and the like, Ellis pretended to be sleepy, and from pretending soon fell asleep in earnest.

IT WAS dusk when Farnham aroused him and said:

"I've eaten. Here's bread and meat I fetched along with me. Get at it and we'll be going. Time to make our call."

Ellis made short work of the food and limped painfully after his rescuer down the slope. They left the mule, so as not to arouse Leaper's attention or excite his suspicions. Ellis was surprised to find how short a distance the mule had brought him from the cabin. He had believed that the involuntary ride had covered several miles. On beholding the light he exclaimed—

"Surely that can't be the cabin!"

"Surely can't be any other unless one's been built since sunup," assured Farnham. "Now this is the way we'll work it. Leaper must be caught off his guard. I don't intend to be killed or even broken up by him. I'm a bummer. I'm no good. I'll go to the cabin and beg for food and a place to sleep. I'm nearly starved. I'm not worth robbing. Once inside I must wait for a chance to get the drop on Leaper. May have to kill him in his tracks."

Ellis hoped the affair might end thus.

"He's strong as a grizzly and half crazy. If he puts up a fight I'll nail him. What I want to do is to take him alive and carry him to Denver. You keep outside till I whistle; then come on the jump. Pick up a club from the firewood by the door and be ready to belt him over the head."

"What if there's some one with him, one of the gang you were telling about?" nervously whispered Ellis.

"Then I must remain a camp rat, stay if he'll let me, or be kicked out," cheerfully amended Farnham. "Still I should know ahead if any one's with him. While I'm making for the door you sneak to the window and see if he's alone. If he isn't you'd better go up the gulch and spend the night with the mule."

Ellis slowly advanced to a position opposite the small window. Leaper was squatting before the fire, intent on counting a roll of money. Something aroused his suspicions, possibly the tensity of Ellis' gaze. He lifted his head and glared about like a wild animal scenting the hunter. Then he came to his feet and pulled aside a wolf skin on the wall and thrust the money in a niche between the logs and centered his gaze on the door. Ellis cautiously withdrew and gained Farnham's side, and whispered:

"Alone, but on his guard. Must have heard some sound."

"Haven't moved a muscle. Back to the window. Come in when the trouble starts. I may be too busy to whistle," quickly directed Farnham.

Then he commenced a stumbling advance toward the door and called out—

"Hi, there, in the house!"

Almost before he finished calling out the door opened and Leaper stood on the threshold, his head thrust forward to escape contact with the lintel log.

"Who's that barking? Who be you?" harshly demanded Leaper as the ragged figure limped into the light streaming through the doorway.

"Starving man. Out of luck. Give me a hunk of bread," gasped Farnham, and he walked unsteadily.

"Get away from here, you —— beggar, or I'll kill you!" roared Leaper.

"Good lord! Just a bite to keep my innards quiet till I can make a settlement," pleaded Farnham. "I ain't eaten for so long I really believe I'll die here before your door in this gulch if I don't have food. Anything. A dry crust you wouldn't give a dog. Just a few mouthfuls."

Perhaps Leaper did not relish the idea of a penniless wanderer dying near his cabin for him to bury, for conceal such an unfortunate he must, or have the name without the game. He clawed his fingers through his tangled beard for a few moments, then growled and stepped back and motioned Farnham to enter.

"What I'd give a dog, eh?" he rumbled. "You're a dog. Swaller that and get clear of this gulch or I'll cut your throat."

He picked up a slab of coarse bread and broke it in two and tossed half of it to Farnham, who was now standing beside the door. Farnham grabbed for it eagerly and awkwardly and it fell to the floor. He bent forward and picked it up with his left hand and at the same time pulled the heavy revolver from his boot with his right hand. Then he was erect and hurling the bread into Leaper's face and was felling him to the floor with a blow from the heavy barrel. It was all finished in two seconds.

Ellis, holding his breath, stared in amazement through the window as the warder of Warder's Hill was thus summarily disposed of. He had considered Leaper to be little less than a demon. There he was on the floor, blood trickling from the wound on his shaggy head and Farnham whipping handcuffs from the second boot leg and snapping them on the brute's wrists.

The marshal brought Ellis out of his stupor by glancing toward the window and announcing:

"All over. He was an easy nut to crack. Come in!"

Leaper was not seriously hurt, for the marshal's words were barely uttered before he roared mightily and started to get on his feet. The revolver barrel landed on his head and sent him back. When Ellis entered the room, the fallen giant was beating his head on the floor and tearing his manacled hands through his long beard.

Farnham stared down at him and encouraged:

"Abuse yourself all you want to. No one here to stop you."

Leaper ceased his violence and glared at the marshal in silence. On beholding Ellis some of his cunning returned and all of his hate. He slowly rose to his feet, Farnham watching him closely. He raised his hands and sprang to bring them down on Ellis' head. The marshal thrust forward a foot and tripped him headlong. Then the marshal snatched a piece of rope from a peg and deftly looped it around the prisoner's ankles.

"You've had enough exercise," he said.

Ellis was afraid of the man despite the ease with which Farnham had mastered him. Leaper glared at him malevolently and began his wild laughing. Ellis feared the man would remember Waggle's talk about Skillings' death and repeat it to the marshal. The latter prevented any immediate recital by saying:

"I'm going to fetch the mule. Watch this man sharp. If he tries any game, belt him over the head with a stool."

He disappeared into the darkness and Leaper recovered his self-control enough to realize he was not furthering his own cause.

"Who is that man?" he asked of Ellis.

"United States marshal from Buckskin. He saved my life after you thought you'd done for me."

"Pretty company he's in when he comes here with you. Does he know you murdered Skillings?"

"No one knows that. It isn't a fact," said Ellis.

"Waggle says it is a fact. See here, if I go to Denver with him you'll go along, tied to me, and you'll swing," warned Leaper.

Ellis did not believe he could face the prisoner's disclosure. He stepped to the hiding place in the logs and removed the hidden money and counted it. It was the same amount taken from him that morning. "Let me loose and save yourself trouble. You've got your money," urged Leaper.

"No. Farnham saved my life. Tell him what you like."

Leaper was disappointed. He was silent for a minute, then he suggested:

"If you don't give evidence against me in Denver I'll keep my mouth shut about Skillings. Want to trade?"

Farnham had said he already had one of the man's victims ready to give evidence. Ellis believed it would be equivalent to surrendering himself to the law on a charge of homicide did he appear as a witness against Leaper and thereby be compelled to give his personal history. He slowly replied:

"I won't testify against you until you tell what Waggle said. If you tell it, or if Bill Waggle tells it, I'll testify that you robbed me and tried to murder me."

"A bargain," growled Leaper. "Nothing can be done to me till we reach Denver. I have friends there. I'll have word passed to Bill to keep shut about you. You'll save your neck and I'll have a chance to save mine."

"I've already told Farnham you robbed me. I'll have to tell him I have it back," informed Ellis.

Leaper scowled over this; then decided:

"It won't matter if you don't tell it in court. The bargain stands."

He made no effort to release his hands and apparently was asleep when the marshal returned. Ellis produced the money and explained seeing Leaper hide it and asked

Farnham to count it. The marshal did so and told him to keep it. Then he searched the cabin carefully for other moneys, but found none. Leaper kept his eyes closed during all this but Farnham noticed his big face was twisted into a grimace or a smile.

"That feller's hurting himself laughing," said Farnham. "Let's have grub."

Ellis cooked bacon and made coffee and the prisoner opened his eyes and was permitted to eat. Farnham decided they should stand watch over the man through the night and elected to be the first. It was two o'clock of a new day when Ellis was aroused. He sat wrapped in a blanket until sunrise.

Breakfast was quickly cooked and eaten. Leaper had not spoken a word since Farnham returned with the mule the night before. His eyes glittered with hope when Ellis returned from the corral and announced the mule was gone.

"Then we'll walk," decided Farnham.

"I'm not walking," Leaper broke his long silence to inform.

"You'll walk," assured Farnham. To Ellis, "Cut two stout cudgels. This man walks and walks brisk, or he'll never walk again."

Leaper stood up and surrendered—

"I'm ready."

The sun was warm and genial until they came to where Ellis had made the wrong turn; then clouds swiftly closed the sky and rain began. The wind beat in their faces and the road grew muddy. Leaper walked savagely, as if wishing to tire his captors or have the disagreeable journey over with. Ellis found some shelter by keeping close to his heels.

The storm passed away when they were within two miles of the Salt Works. Ahead of them rose an isolated mountain, and soon they were cheered by the sight of smoke rising from its base.

The plain had been dreary enough during the storm but now it was pleasing in the sunshine. Farnham called Ellis' attention to what looked like patches of snow and told him they were salt incrustations, but the Singing Pilgrim was more interested in the large cabin and the smoking chimney.

Two long wagons were near the cabin and another was loading salt from a shanty. Several teamsters and employees stared curiously at Leaper, for handcuffs were seldom seen in the mountains. Charles Hall, New York born, but a veteran of the mountains, came out of the house and greeted Farnham cordially. The marshal explained his business and asked for a chance to ride with his prisoner to Denver or, at least, as far as Fair Play.

Mr. Hall promptly told him:

"You'll ride clear through. You've walked enough. Come inside you two and have some dinner. The prisoner can be fed afterward in the kitchen. One wagon is starting in a few hours for Denver and will make Fair Play some time this evening. How about the young man? Fussy when he starts?"

"I'll travel anytime when I can get a lift," said Ellis.

He was anxious to separate from Farnham before reaching Denver.

"Then you'd better start right after you eat. A light-hitch is going only as far as Fair Play. After Farnham's wagon has left a load there you can ride with him the rest of the trip."

It was a wonderful dinner they sat down to, and after they had eaten Leaper proved he had not lost his appetite. Leaper was still bolting meat and hot bread when a teamster came to the door and announced he was ready to start. Ellis hurriedly shook hands with Mr. Hall and the marshal and ran to the wagon. Farnham called after him—

"See you soon in Fair Play."

Ellis waved a hand and climbed up beside the driver. He had no intention of becoming acquainted with Denver courts and justice through any prolonged association with the marshal.

COLORADO was a military district, and Denver was under martial law with the provost guard discouraging quarrels between soldiers and civilians. Surviving members of the notorious Criterion saloon gang refrained from flaunting their wickedness, and worked by stealth. Desperate and reckless men continued to rob and kill, but no longer boasted of their evil in public.

If Carl Wood, Charles Harrison, and Steele, the gambler, no longer shot up the town there was at work a more widely spread organization, operating with a definite purpose and considerable efficiency.

In place of reckless and open outlawry

and braggadocio in drinking saloons, with bullet or rope ultimately curing them, there was the loosely knit association of thieves and bandits that methodically worked for profit and had for its field the entire Colorado territory and a portion of New Mexico.

At least half of the citizens in the Arkansas valley and a goodly portion of those at the heads of the Platte sympathized with secession at the outbreak of war. Many had returned home to support the South, but enough remained in the mountains and Denver to strike sparks of discord.

Until the provost guard was mounted, quarrels between soldiers and civilians were of frequent occurrence. Wild rumors of the Knights of the Golden Circle establishing branches in camps and towns, of plans to seize the gold country and divert its riches into the treasury of the Confederacy, of Missouri guerrillas about to collect rich toll from the private mines and the strong boxes of merchants and express offices in Denver, the lawless element was provided with an excellent screen to work behind.

War news, relayed from the old California Crossing two hundred miles away, frequently fanned sectional differences into violence. General Butler at New Orleans was execrated by southern men in Denver and was staunchly supported by unionists. McClellan's retirement from the Peninsula and Jackson's victory at Cedar Mountain caused jubilation and chagrin. Immediately on the receipt of war news the provost guard was on edge to maintain order.

Of intimate concern and interest was the ferocious guerrilla warfare in Kansas and Missouri. Already it had closed the Arkansas valley to immigration and stifled the hopes of southern towns to rival Denver.

Unless the two border states should become more tranquil, travel up the Platte likewise would be blocked. Neither southern nor northern man cared to be shut off from eastern supplies of food and machinery. Yet ever closer was the danger of a general Indian uprising. Distorted reports of the Sioux massacres in Minnesota—and the truth was evil enough—were being brought from the crossing by special couriers. Veteran mountain men were convinced the Plains Sioux and Cheyennes were on the verge of smoking war tobacco, and that it was only a matter of days before the Kiowas as a nation would commence hostilities.

In this connection it was prophesied that the Arapahos would join their ancient friends, the Cheyennes, and that the Utes would seize the opportunity to ravage and plunder.

The August draft of three hundred thousand nine-months men was continually taking toll among the able-bodied northerners. And just as assiduously men were continually making for Texas to later meet their Colorado acquaintances on hostile fields.

Now that placer mining had seen its best days, claim and mine owners were turning speculators. There were no holdings in the Gregory districts that eastern capital could not purchase. Miners had become mine owners. There was a general belief that more money could be made by buying and selling than by developing. The real estate market was very active. Brick and lumber were abundant and the former was, perhaps, the cheaper building material.

Handsome brick blocks and commodious frame structures covered the sites of Sixty-One's huts and tents. Speculators were endeavoring to boom the highlands on the bluffs opposite the city, but were finding it rather slow work. In the city proper realty values were constantly increasing. Trade markets fluctuated weirdly. Prices mounted as transportation became uncertain in fact or fancy, and often dropped to cost when delayed trains arrived close together, and for a time glutted the market. Agriculture had not been thoroughly tested. All supplies necessary for farming and mining came from the East and at times paid a freight tariff of ten cents a pound.

Nathan Goss, recently arrived on a horse bought at Cameron's ranch, was quick to sense the cross currents of purpose as he walked the busy streets and refreshed himself with watching the activities. He was weary of mountain camps. This thriving community on the gradually sloping plain was a great relief. Had he felt free to resume his vocation, he would have been thoroughly contented; but there was Frank Ellis to be found, rather an annoying duty.

Euclid, the young eccentric, had gone to Cañon City. Veiled inquiries at the Broadwell House had failed to find any trace of Ellis. Desire insisted he had done what he could to locate the young man and that he could not afford to waste more time. Yet Ellis was on top of his mind even as he found pleasure in strolling the streets. He thought of him every time he saw a pilgrim just "arrived out."

He walked aimlessly, searching for Ellis in the passing groups, trying to appease the voice of duty. And all the while he enjoyed the absence of that shut-in feeling. For two years he largely had lived in deep and narrow gulches. These streets, eighty feet wide, gave him an uplift and caused him to feel he had escaped from a dreary captivity. Yet he felt he must do his utmost to find the Singing Pilgrim.

"Nuisance. Old enough to look after himself," he muttered as he stood on F Street and glimpsed the waters of the Platte five blocks away, where a year before Arapaho lodges and tents of immigrants had stood. Beyond the river were the mountains, gay with many colors, like giants bedecking themselves with a woman's finery.

Nor were the Indians entirely retired from the town. Many had learned to crave liquor, and remained and lived in sordid slavery for the sake of an occasional dram. He encountered one, an Arapaho, near the *Rocky Mountain News* office, trying to tell William Byers, editor and publisher, that he wanted him to say in his talking paper that his chief, Little Raven, would pay ten ponies for the return of his lost Buchanan medal, distributed in the fall of 1860 together with Lincoln and Douglas medals.

From the Broadwell House the gambler passed the brick church and entered a maze of stores, gaming halls, saloons and the homes of light-o'-loves, and wandered widely. He was doing his duty by the Singing Pilgrim, he told himself, while he aimlessly drifted with the crowd or stemmed the current to inspect a gambling place. In Heatly and Chase's place he was invited to make up a poker outfit, but declined.

Night would be early enough to resume his work. Until then he must satisfy his eyes with roomy streets. He found much pleasure in loitering up streets that ran northwest and gazing at Long's Peak. This view made him feel like a man who has escaped from prison and who lingers in open places to look back on the scene of his detention.

Finally he came to a halt in front of the old Pacific House, where a crowd was blocking the street, gathered there by the spectacle of a woman in fluffy skirts walking a tight-rope across Larimer Street. His interest was as keen as that of a young boy watching his first circus. He gave no heed when a hand touched his elbow. He realized it was not an accidental contact with the crowd when strong fingers seized his arm and shook it impatiently. Turning his head he stared into the vicious face of Bill Waggle.

THE fingers of his right hand slipped inside his left cuff as he remarked—

"So you're still alive, Bill?" And he darted his gaze about and demanded—

"Where's Dodge?"

"Gone north to new diggings. How's it feel to be run out the gulch?"

"You're a liar. I walked out."

Waggle grinned and asked—

"Where's your young hooting friend?"

With a show of indifference he was far from feeling Goss replied:

"Don't know. He quit the gulch ahead of me. Haven't seen him since."

"I have."

Goss' face froze. Disturbed, and anxious to learn where Waggle met Ellis, he indifferently remarked— "That so? What of it?"

"Nothing of it. But if you see him just remind him to remember his bargain and keep his mouth shut."

"What bargain? With whom? Just what do you mean, Waggle?"

"Our cat's waking up. Pilgrim will know what I mean. And I ain't known as Waggle in this town."

"If folks here should know what I know you'll be wearing a rope."

"Mebbe. But you won't give me away."

"I don't talk a lot. Still I tried to shoot you in California Gulch for sneaking that gun to Dodge. But you speak as if making a threat, as if daring me to call out your name and history. I can be bluffed, Waggle. But only by a much better man than you."

"Go ahead and shout," defied Waggle. "But if there's a rope for me there'll be another for the Singing Pilgrim and he'll stretch it."

"Talk, talk," complained the gambler wearily. "What are you coming at?"

"The *News* printed a piece about Skillings' death. Said the Pilgrim skipped out and is wanted. I know things. You keep your yap shut and I'll keep mine shut. Just tell him to remember his bargain."

Goss stared at him stonily for a moment, then said:

"All right. But why think I'm likely to meet him?"

"Cause he's here in Denver somewhere. I've tried to locate him and tell him to git out of town. I saw you leaving Heatly's place and trailed you till I could find you in a crowd like this. The younker will be in his last bit of trouble if he's found by certain folks and goes to blatting. If he keeps his word and clears out my friends will keep mum."

"I'm no talker," repeated Goss. "But if ever I drop a gun on you again your troubles will be all over, so far as the mountain country's concerned. That woman has nerve."

And he gazed at the tight-rope walker now finishing her aerial journey at an open window.

When he turned his head Waggle had disappeared. The gambler remained, staring at the window, seemingly much interested in the exhibition. Inwardly he was much perturbed by the ruffian's talk. He had trained his face and nerves but he never could train his heart. Prematurely experienced in concealing his feelings he was none the less human. Having acted as Ellis' protector he found he was unable to put aside his sense of responsibility.

"Young idiot!" he muttered as he turned up the street. "And where did that skunk see him after he left us at Twin Lakes? Says he knows he's in Denver. He couldn't have seen him here, or he'd talked to him and wouldn't be sending any word by me. Wonder if he really knows he's here, or if he thinks it and was trying to learn something definite from me?"

He went back to the Broadwell House and wandered into the bar. Only by a strong effort did he maintain his bored bearing once he saw Whip King, whip in hand and with the dust of the trail on his shoulders, leaning against the upper end of the bar and talking with a number of freighters. Whip King called out to him. Goss acknowledged the greeting with a gesture and went to the other end of the bar and ordered a glass of lager. After a few minutes Whip King quit the group and came down the bar and greeted—

"How's tricks?"

Goss waited until the bartender filled a second glass and returned to wait on the freighters, then replied:

"Rather bad. The Singing Pilgrim was to meet me here. Just heard he's in Denver, but I can't locate him."

And he sketched his adventures among the Utes and about Ellis starting alone from Twin Lakes to make the city.

For the moment Whip King's interest was not on Ellis, for he exclaimed:

"Euclid snagged by Injuns! Bet he talked them crazy. Now down in Cañon City. If that don't beat all nature!"

"I'm more concerned about the Pilgrim. Euclid isn't wanted for anything, or by anybody. He'd drive me crazy in a month."

"If the Pilgrim is here he'll be showing up. I went after a man down on the Canadian once and found him. Oughter be easy to locate a man in this town. My friends up the line—" he nodded toward the freighters at the end of the bar—"was just telling me that United States Marshal Farnham has fetched in a man from below the Salt Works. Jonathan Leaper by name. Believed to have killed several miners arriving out of the mines. It's believed he's one of the gang that's been raising so much —— 'tween here'n Taos for the last two years. They say there's two witnesses against him that'll spike him into a wooden box sure's some steers are wild. Got extry guards so's none of the gang will git him loose."

The last sentence interested Goss as it suggested a possible reason for Waggle's presence in town. He did not mention Waggle to Whip King, for there was suddenly born in his mind the suspicion that harm would come to Ellis if the ruffian were arrested. There was the bargain Waggle intimated Ellis had made with some one. Goss finally said:

"Whip King, I'm in trouble. I must find Ellis at once if he's here in Denver. I'll give the town a real combing this time. He was to call here. No one by the name of Ellis has shown up."

"Probably shifted his name."

"That may be, but he'd be as safe under his own name. Only two ways he can be recognized, by some one who knew him in California Gulch or by his singing voice. I'll try the desk again."

He found the clerk and inquired if any one had asked for him or for Whip King.

"Not a soul, Mr. Goss," assured the clerk. And he turned away to wait on a newcomer.

The gambler moodily cut the end of a cigar and was about to light it when he heard a most musical voice say:

"Thank you. I'm rather uncertain how long I shall stay here."

Goss turned as she walked to the stairs, preceded by a boy carrying a beflowered carpetbag and followed by an employee lugging a small horsehide trunk. Goss saw only the woman's back, but he had heard her voice. From her graceful carriage he knew she was young and from her voice he decided she must be beautiful. But women were no novelty in Denver. Back in the old days two years before every masculine eye would have followed the slim figure. Goss gave her attention simply because there was a quality in her voice which was vaguely reminiscent of something. It almost came to him. He moved to the end of the desk for a last word with the clerk and said—

"If any one asks for me tell him to leave a note, saying when and where he'll meet me, and——"

His tongue became paralyzed as a downward sweep of his gaze fell on the prim signature—

Annie Ellis, Martinsville, Indiana.

"When and where he'll meet you?" prompted the clerk.

"Yes. I'll be back soon," mumbled Goss.

He turned toward the door, his disciplined mind for once in a sad whirl. Men entering from the street blocked his way. As he stepped aside and waited he heard a man say:

"It's a phase every community of quick growth seems bound to go through. Too much gambling and speculation, too much recklessness and disregard for law and order. The men trying to raise crops out here find that for the first few years their efforts are defeated by insect pests. In town building it's much the same. But after we have settled down the gambler and thug will be driven out, at least into hiding, just as the grasshoppers and other nuisances will be overcome by the farmer."

The speaker was Governor Evans, personal friend of President Lincoln, and successor to William Gilpin, after the latter was, perhaps, too harshly judged for cutting red tape and sending his pet lambs to defeat "Baylor's Babes" and discourage the Confederacy's efforts to secure and control the gold lands.

Goss sidled along to the door and gained the street with his mind ringing with the one word, phase. Gambling was well near universal in the camps and towns. Goss had seen a Colorado sheriff pawn his revolver to continue in a poker game. He had played with law-givers and national legislators, with merchants and miners. He always had prided himself on being a square card-man.

Governor Evans evidently considered gambling an incident, something shortlived. Goss resented the characterization. It was the one occupation he had qualified for. If gambling ceased to be the general pastime, or if it became something furtive, he would have no vocation. The thought was disturbing. Even in the midst of his wonderment and dismay over the Ellis girl's arrival he had to meditate on the governor's prophecy and consider if he, a gambler, was something very transient.

"If gambling is stopped I'll be as deep in cap as the Pilgrim," he muttered as he wandered aimlessly to the corner.

Then his thoughts switched back to his friend and the girl and, being off his guard, his lean, dark face betrayed the concern and bewilderment promptly returned to lodge in his mind. If Ellis did not turn up what would his sister do? And if he did appear, what would she do?

"And why the —— did she come out here like this?" he hopelessly asked himself.

Situations calling for direct methods, such as shooting it out with Charley Dodge, were easily handled. But how was one to go to a lonely young woman and bluntly explain her brother had disappeared, or that he was, practically, a fugitive from mountain justice? To remain aloof and permit her to remain in agonizing ignorance was unthinkable.

GOSS halted at G street between Market and Blake where many had gathered to watch stage coaches and other passenger vehicles start for the river. Near-by was Jim Beckwourth, for years head chief of the Crows but now trying his hand at farming. His long black hair and reckless visage and dark complexion made him an outstanding figure even among those who allowed their hair to grow and preferred buckskin to woolen.

Contrary to popular belief this picturesque mixed-blood was a mulatto and not of Indian-white descent. Clinging to his arm was his Mexican wife, a tiny creature to whom, with a flourish, he was presenting an old mountain man. He addressed her as Madame Beckwourth. The mountainman was William McGaa, known to Beckwourth and old-time trappers as Jack Jones, who was eating his heart out because the street named after him had been rechristened after Holladay.

Madame Beckwourth was forgotten as the two men began reminiscing volubly, and unconsciously duplicating their spoken speech with the sign language of the Plains Indians.

"Tie their hands and they couldn't talk," murmured Whip King over Goss' shoulder. "Makes me feel sort of homesick to see so many outfits pulling out and me left here. I'll soon be forgetting how to crack my whip."

"Just the man I want to talk with," softly exclaimed Goss. "Best of luck we've come together again."

"Luck, nothing! I've been trailing you ever since you quit the hotel. Something happened?"

"The Singing Pilgrim's sister has arrived at the Broadwell House," groaned Goss. "Somebody must meet her and tell her something."

"Good land! But that sounds sort of bad! Arrived out with no one expecting her," mumbled Whip King. "But your talk sounds hazy. Somebody tell her something! Who knows what's to be told her? Why did she come out here? And who's to tell her? And tell her what?"

"I pass," surrendered Goss gloomily. "Not a card in my hand nor an idea in my head. But if a stranger must call on her to explain, you're the man. I don't know what you can say."

"No, siree! I'll tackle a grizzly with my old whip. See here, Nathan. You happen round up there. She'll be asking questions. You chip in and tell her."

"What?" snarled Goss.

"Well, whatever seems to be best."

"Ellis is the one to talk to his sister," continued Goss. "I believe he is still in town. I know he was here. You must help me find him."

"Like hunting for a jackknife I once lost on Green River," grumbled Whip King. "But let's be looking. I'll round up lodging houses. You look in stores. He may be working."

Depending largely upon luck the two separated. Ellis was not known in Denver; and had he been his searchers would not have risked asking about him by name. Whip King had selected the more tedious part of the hunt. The gambler could enter a store and glance at the employees and be done with the place. The wagon train boss could only loiter about doorways and observe the tenants entering and leaving. He could ask no questions. After several hours of this unsatisfactory work Whip King started back to the Broadwell House, hoping that Goss had been more successful. On the way he met United States Marshal Hunt. The marshal had just left the jail on Larimer street near E. After shaking hands and exchanging greetings the marshal informed:

"We have a bloody, red-handed murderer in there and there's a chance of his going free. Couple of years ago we'd hung him from the Cherry creek bridge and gone home to supper. But the court can't convict unless there's sufficient evidence. When Marshal Farnham brought him in there was every prospect of a hanging. Farnham worked up the case. Had two witnesses on tap who could have settled Leaper's hash. That's his name, Jonathan Leaper. Now we're in a fine stew. One witness, tied to a mule and turned loose in the mountains by Leaper, has died from the shock of his wild ride. United States Attorney Sam Brown says he can't go to trial without some evidence."

"You spoke of two witnesses," reminded Whip King. "I've heard queer yarns about Leaper. But nothing you could hang your hat on. Worked alone and lived alone. No woman in his life to give him away."

"The other witness was a young man. Supposed to come in with Farnham. They separated at the Salt Works and were to meet at Fair Play. Young man plumb disappeared. That leaves Brown high and dry. He has a murderer but no witnesses."

"Hard luck. S'pose you're hunting for the missing witness."

"We don't even know he ever made

Denver," said Hunt. "If he did some of the gang may have made away with him. We'll look for him but there's too many young men in Denver for me to pick out the right stranger. We're going to run a notice in the *News*, asking him to call at the jail. Maybe he'll turn up in a few days."

"Probably," agreed Whip King. "What we need is for some sort of a game like what young Dave Cook has in mind. Wish he'd come back from the service and start it going."

"Meaning his 'Rocky Mountain Detective Association,' " said Hunt. "Well, I don't know. The idea is fine, but where can you get the right kind of men to chase lawbreakers? Men with guts and brains enough to handle the bad ones out here are in business, or politics. It'll take capital to start the association. Cook himself is smart enough. Looks rather dubious."*

"Cook's young. Not much over twenty; but he'll never get that bee out of his bonnet, and big profits won't ever tempt him into any other line of work. Hope you find that other young man."

With this Whip King walked on to the hotel.

Goss was standing just inside the main entrance, his gaze fixed on the door. Before Whip King could speak the gambler was motioning him to a chair and was whispering:

"I found him! Didn't know him at first. Shaved clean and well dressed. Working next to the corner of F and Blake in Brown and Daniels grocery store. He was much upset by my talk. He's hiding to keep from being called on as a witness in court. Just as soon as he finishes his work and when it gets dark he'll come up and see his sister. He wanted me to see her and prepare her for his coming; to tell her about his hard luck. She's out shopping. My nerve failed. I wouldn't have gone up if she'd been here."

"He mustn't come here," growled Whip King. And he repeated his talk with United States Marshal Hunt.

"By ——! Leave it to that fellow to get into trouble!" groaned the gambler. "If he had a pat hand he'd find there were five aces in it. Now what's to be done? If he goes into court he'll be identified and held for Skillings' death. That's what Bill Waggle meant by his roundabout threats and his hints about a bargain. Bargain with this Leaper. Bargain must be that the gang will keep shut about him being wanted in California Gulch if he'll keep off the witness stand. Didn't have more'n half a minute to speak with. I'm to go back and pick him up. He's a Jonah."

Whip King scowled heavily and pursed his thick lips thoughtfully. Finally he said:

"Maybe it's best for him to go to court and take the chances. Shortest way out of it."

"He ran away the night the man was killed. He's kept away from Farnham since leaving him. The gang will send men in to swear him into a noose."

"You can't get clear of trouble by running away from it," doggedly insisted Whip King. "Sooner he squares his accounts the quicker he can have a chance to quit being afraid of his shadder. I still hold he must go into court and tell."

Goss broke off the sentence by clutching his arm fiercely. Then he murmured, "His sister! Think of the shock to her if he is accused of murder!"

Whip King lifted his eyes and beheld a sweet-faced young woman. She had several small parcels in her arms and her face was flushed from walking. She halted opposite the men and gazed eagerly about the office. Her small face revealed disappointment and she moved on slowly, as if undecided. She started toward the desk, hesitated, then turned and hurried up the stairs.

Whip King fiercely bit the end from a cigar and forgot to light it.

"He'd best keep out of court if he can," he sharply decided. "I've shifted my bets. Twice the young fool ran away. If he can keep out of sight till Leaper's been hung or set free folks will forget about the Skillings case. By spring California Gulch will have forgotten him. Here's an idea: Cañon City is well near empty. Ancient Days has a little ranch a few miles below it. What if he and his sister go down there and spend the winter? He can take possession if Ancient isn't there. They'll be more'n welcome if Ancient is there. Anyway he must get clear of Denver before some of Sam Brown's boys locate him."

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* David J. Cook. B. Indiana, 1840. Mining in Col., 1859. Then two years farming in Kansas and freighting. Enlisted. Transferred to Ordnance Dept. of frontier, '63, and organized the Rocky Mountain Detective Association in that year. Worked much with sheriffs in Wyoming. Nate K. Boswell arrested Jesse James and lodged him in Laramie City Jail. James released for lack of evidence, no one knowing his true identity. Shortly afterward Boswell saw a picture of James and recognized him as the released prisoner. Cook's frontier adventures covered twenty years and includes battles with the boldest bandits of the old border.

Goss nodded approvingly and indorsed—

"Now you're drawing to the full strength of your hand."

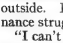
Whip King sternly declared, "If I thought he'd done wrong I'd give him up to the authorities."

"I wouldn't," replied the gambler. "Now I must go back and tell him about this last wrinkle and arrange for his leaving town. Then the girl must be told."

He reached the grocery store a few minutes before Ellis' supper time and waited outside. Ellis soon joined him, his countenance struggling between worry and delight.

"I can't wait a minute," was his greeting to Goss. "I'd give a million if I had it if Annie hadn't come out like this. And yet I never was so homesick in my life for anything as I am to see her."

"Can't blame you," said Goss, "but the game's getting a little crowded. Too many sitting in. We'll walk along and I'll tell you."



THE LED his perturbed companion to the foot of F street where they could have the privacy of the river bank. Nor would the gambler talk until they reached the river. Then he rapidly outlined the new dangers and difficulties, and repeated Whip King's advice—an immediate departure for Cañon City.

After the first feeling of discouragement Ellis was willing to do anything which might spare his sister trouble.

"Can you call on her and explain?" he asked. "And arrange for us to meet somewhere?"

The gambler shook his head and firmly insisted:

"You must see her and do the explaining. Until that notice appears in the *News* there's no more danger of you being recognized in the Broadwell than in the store. You follow me in and go right upstairs. Her room is No. 10. After twenty minutes I'll come up! If the young lady's game we'll pull out tonight, you two in a light rig and I on my horse. I'll see you through to Cañon City."

"She'll do anything for me," sighed Ellis. "And it's mighty kind of you to take the bother. I don't know when I can pay back that hundred."

Goss' dark face flushed with anger, and he complained:

"Always the way. It's always the woman who'll do anything for a man who's in hard luck."

"But she's my sister," reminded Ellis.

"Saltpeter! But you're her brother," replied Goss. "Kept that in the front of your mind rather than the hundred dollars. It's for you to be the one who'll do anything. She's the one who should be helped. I had a glimpse of her. She doesn't look much bigger than a drink."

"Good heavens, Nathan! I'd die—anything for Annie!" passionately cried Ellis.

"I suppose so. Most men, brothers, would at a pinch," mumbled Goss. "I'm out of sorts from missing my supper. You're all right, Pilgrim. Just working in cap again. But you have the best luck in the world in having a sister. —— of it with me is my being an only child. Well, let's not chase deuces into the grave. Each of us cuts open a dog some time or other."[*]

They made for the hotel, the gambler declaring the time to be propitious, as guests would be busy eating supper. They had expected to find the office practically deserted, but fresh war news had arrived while they were talking by the river and many had gathered from the street to gossip and argue.

When the two entered the office they found it lively with excited groups. The gambler nodded toward the stairs and, as Ellis mounted to find his sister, joined a party of disputants. The man standing directly in front of him, back to, was warning:

"No —— secesh talk here. There's a war on."

"Can't a man express an honest opinion without being called a rebel, Sam Brown?" demanded an angry citizen.

Goss did not linger to hear the marshal's reply, but shifted his position to another noisy group closer to the stairs. Brown's presence was an unexpected danger. He did not know Ellis by sight, but he represented the Law. Goss waited and consulted his watch impatiently. He feared lest Ellis descend and be confronted by the marshal and be asked to give his name and antecedents. At last he was free to run upstairs and to Miss Ellis' room. He tapped timidly and Ellis' voice called out—

"Who's there?"

The voice was uneven and seemed to lack confidence.

The gambler gave his name and the door

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[*] Early Colorado for "make a mistake," "be in error."

was unlocked and opened. On entering he was greatly disturbed to observe the girl trying to erase signs of weeping. Ellis hurriedly explained:

"Annie, this is the friend I was speaking of, Nathan Goss. My sister, Nate. She doesn't like the idea of hiding."

"You've told her everything?" significantly asked Goss. He found it impossible to maintain his poker expression under the girl's questioning gaze.

"Everything."

More at ease Goss told the girl—

"Your brother, ma'am, isn't to be blamed for anything except having a streak of hard luck, which comes some time or other to the best of folks."

"But he's the best of folks," she quickly reminded. "People here must know that."

"The Pilgrim is all right, ma'am," agreed Goss. "But most every one in the territory is a stranger to most every one else. I don't see as it'll do any one any good for him to give himself up when he's innocent."

"Not even to clear himself?" she demanded.

"Some times it's the honest man who can't clear himself," he slowly replied. "Not knowing anything about a certain scallywag's death he can't say anything except that he didn't do it. There's two men who know who did it—the murderer and an Indian hunter. The first won't tell, of course. The last might be induced to, although he refused to tell me. He stays in the mountains and comes to camps only to sell meat. It might take all winter to find him. When he's found and says he'll talk then we can walk into court. Whip King believes as I do—that your brother better lose himself for a while."

"Whip King?" she repeated, her eyes reflecting her bewilderment.

"Master hand with a long whip, ma'am. A man you can hang your hat on. Trust him, you know."

The girl was perplexed and suspicious of the quaint talking young man her brother called friend. Ellis sensed her prejudice and hurriedly informed:

"Not hearing from me for some time and depending on letters I wrote early in the season, she decided to come out. She was planning to start for California Gulch tomorrow."

"All I'm thinking about now is to get you back East," she told him.

"You ought not to have come on a chance of finding me in bonanza," he said.

"I think it's a mighty fine thing her coming," remarked Goss, his dark eyes flashing.

The girl felt she had been rebuked, and her face was dreary with sadness. She confessed:

"I'm afraid I've been foolish. It costs lots of money to come. But I was homesick."

It impressed Ellis as being odd that one snugly back in Martinsville should be homesick. Goss eagerly insisted:

"It was brave of you, ma'am. Your brother has been working in cap the whole season, but who knows if he won't strike rich ore another season? He can get work at Cañon City. Friends of ours have a little ranch near there. Garden stuff fetches a good price. Next spring he can try prospecting. Maybe I'll go with him."

"You're a miner, Mr. Goss? You know about mines?"

There was scepticism in the question. Goss had no idea what Ellis had told her. He gravely replied:

"Perhaps a speculator would be near right, ma'am. I've been in the diggings two years and in my way have taken quite a few chances."

She walked to the window and stared out on the town and enigmatically observed:

"Frank is very impressionable. I have worried more about his coming under bad influence than his failure to find gold. It's hard for me to understand how he could get into such a mess if he was busy digging dirt and hunting for gold."

Her brother flushed and warmly declared—

"No man in the mines has better friends than I have."

"They would go into court and testify to your character?" she asked without turning from the window. "And Mr. Goss will testify. His word will have influence, naturally."

Now it was Goss' dark face that burned. He coldly answered:

"I have spent my time in the mines and camps. I know but few people here. Where I am known my word goes."

"Great Scott, Annie, there isn't a squarer man in Colorado than Nathan Goss. If you'd seen him run Charley Dodge out of Oro when Dodge had the drop on him——"

"Your sister isn't interested in that," broke in Goss.

"I'm only interested in getting my brother out of this muddle."

"Exactly. That's my only concern just now," assured Goss. "United States Marshal Brown is down in the office. He's keen to find your brother as a witness in the Leaper case. Leaper's other victim is dead. If your brother testifies the lawyers for Leaper will try to discredit him. They'll sink tunnels into his past history. They'll turn him inside-out. Leaper's friends will tell about his flight from California Gulch."

Her face paled and she turned to face them. Ellis despairingly groaned:

"Oh, I know it's bad, almost hopeless. I wish, Annie, you'd take a stage and go back home and leave me to work it out alone."

"Shame on you!" she told him.

Then she was at his side with an arm around his neck and petting him and murmuring:

"Don't worry, dear. It's nothing. We'll go down to this other city and be very happy, I know. In the spring, if we think best, we'll go back East."

"Martinsville will look mighty fine," he murmured.

With a little grimace of pain she told him:

"Not Martinsville, dear. I read your letters to folks They think you've made lots of money. But there's plenty of other places where we can go."

"If you two have decided to go to Cañon City, I advise starting at once, tonight," spoke up Goss.

"Yes, yes. Tonight," agreed Ellis, the United States marshal looming an ominous figure in his thoughts.

"Then, ma'am, I'll go down and arrange for a light rig. Ten minutes after I've left your brother can go down the back way andgo to his lodgings. You, ma'am, have your traps taken down to the office, eat your supper and pay your shot. In an hour I'll call for you with the rig. We'll pick up your brother in front of Cheesman's drug store and he'll take my place in the carriage and I'll shift to my horse. Once out of town we can take it easy. I'll get plenty of supplies and we can make it a sort of a picnic."

He smiled encouragingly. But she was not inclined to an optimistic point of view. For the first time in her life she was confronted with something that frightened her. It was inconceivable in her upright mind that an Ellis ever should have to run from the law. Now the impossible was not only become possible but was even a necessity. She found herself compelled to do some thing offensive. Even with the sacrifice made she would have no guarantee of freedom from fear.

Her faith in her brother remained. He would not knowingly do anything wrong. He had been insistent on coming to the gold lands and the venture had cost them almost all they had, their little home. Then came glowing letters which seemed abundantly to vindicate his judgment. Jealous of his good name and fearing for his safety, she told herself he never waded so deeply into misfortune of his own volition. Some influence had warped his judgment or deceived him.

As she stared at the smiling, dark-faced young man who seemed so worldly wise she wondered if he were not the evil influence. He was too smartly attired and in appearance resembled in no way the desirable young men of Martinsville. She noted his hands were more immaculate than many a girl's. Obviously his speculations did not involve manual labor. Then he must be very keen of wit. Her prejudice against him grew. She did not understand his queer speeches; and what Martinsville did not comprehend it condemned. Her upbringing had been prim and precise. The noises, the license of speech, the innumerable saloons and other queer places she had glimpsed in the short time she had been in the city were entirely to her disliking.

"I will be ready," she told Goss, bowing stiffly.

After the door closed behind him she turned on her brother fiercely and demanded—

"Just who is that man?"

"Nathan Goss, and a good friend to me."

"He calls himself a speculator. Just what does he speculate in?"

Ellis' views on gambling had been the same as hers until he had been in California Gulch for a while. Alone with her the old wholesome restraint returned sufficient for him to be ashamed to name his friend's occupation. As he hesitated she read him as easily as she had when she was the little mother and detecting him in mischief.

"Just the truth, Frank," she prompted.

"He's a good fellow," he blurted. "He's been good to me. Gave me courage when I had none left. Gone out of his way to help me."

"Just the truth, Frank," she gently repeated, drawing him down on the arm of her chair.

"He's a gambler," he confessed. Then outly, "But an honest one."

"An honest gambler!" she muttered and closing her eyes from hopelessness and dreariness. "My poor boy! You wandered farther from Martinsville than I ever guessed."

CHAPTER VII

THE UNINVITED PLAYER

"TOWN'S rather empty," remarked Goss as George Hall, proprietor of the El Progresso saloon and grocery store, was putting up the gambler's order of foodstuffs.

"It'll soon fill up when the men come back from Fair Play, California Gulch, Tarryall, and the Blue River diggings. You're new to Cañon City. Where you stopping?"

"Few miles down the river. Don't expect to stay long. Ranch of my friend, Ancient Day. Wish he'd come back. Sort of jumped his place till he shows up."

"Old Ancient, eh? Queer customer. Ought to be showing up any time. Feller in from California Gulch couple days ago spoke of him. Saw him and Joe Hasty—most folks call Joe Big Bones—as they were coming off Cottonwood creek. They'd been in back somewhere and were about out of grub. I'm glad Joe wasn't having one of his crazy spells. Sometimes he has streaks when he believes the mountains are filled with monsters."

What had been an animated discussion at the bar now exploded in threats of violence. Hall left the gambler and joined the group of gesticulating men and pawed them aside and cried:

"Simmer down! Think this is the old Criterion in Denver? Trying to talk with folks in Pueblo?"

"Nothing that walks on two legs can stand afore me and say that Gineral Stonewall Jackson—" heatedly began an old man with snow-white hair and youthful glittering eyes.

"Softly, grandpap," soothed Hall. "Some of you are for the North and some for the South and all are welcome here till you start fighting. Then you must quit this shebang and find another battlefield. But you're all too sensible to start something that'll end in the kind of fighting that's now tearing up Kansas and Missouri. We all know a guerrilla war in these mountains will make an awful mess without helping North or South. None of us want that. Think what you want to, but softly, softly when it comes to talking."

"But we've got word a bunch of rebs are at Chandler's on Chandler's creek and are bound for Texas," cried a Union man.

"What of it? If you want to fight them join the army," said Hall.

"You don't want them here," added another citizen, Dr. Reid. "Then why object to their leaving the territory."

"You're wishing them luck," growled another disgruntled citizen.

"You all know where my sympathies are," warmly retorted the doctor. "I've never covered anything up. Yet I set your leg and you're walking as well as ever."

"That's true, Doc. And come to think of it you knew I was a Union man when you patched my bones."

"And a few days ago he walked fifty miles to doctor a man on the Greenhorn who boasts of wanting to hang every secesh," added Hall.

"Oh, Doc's all right. If they was all like him I'd never open my yap."

"If we all were like him there wouldn't be any war," said another. And the quarrel was smothered.

Reid was very popular. He opened the first drugstore in Cañon City, building the small stone house with his own hands. He was wholeheartedly devoted to mending sick folks. In his estimation a patient had no politics. In turning to go the doctor remarked—

"If you fellows feel so full-blooded why not hunt for Vicroy down on Hardscrabble and bring him to book for passing bogus gold dust?"

"Good land! Let Vicroy alone," loudly insisted a drunken individual. "His dust was about all the currency we had last winter—that and beaver and deer skins and venison."

This brought a laugh and the bartender set them up on the house. Hall returned to the amused gambler and complained:

"Running this place at times is like working in a barrel of powder with a lighted candle. Every time a fresh batch of war news comes in the boys smell blood."

"That way in all the camps. Still, there's mighty little fighting on account of the war. Both sides know what'll happen if Reb and Yank ever getting to spilling blood. Any games running?"

"Not to amount to anything yet. A month ago only six people here. But we'll brighten up a lot after the boys get back. Feeling lucky?"

"Just want to be doing something."

Hall cast a shrewd glance at the polished boots and carefully fitted coat and lowering his voice informed:

"I can tell you where to find a game so long as you ain't fighting battles for North or South. Those men making for Texas aren't at Chandler's place yet. They're stopping less 'n two miles south of here on Grape creek. Wild bloods, full of fight. Two were in here and bought grub, whisky and cards. All have dust. But probably they won't welcome any one not of their own way of thinking."

"Thanks. I'm a fine thinker."

The door of the saloon flew violently open and abruptly stopped the talking at the bar. A small man with a bristling beard that suggested the quilled coat of a hedgehog fairly hurled himself over the threshold and across the room to the group of drinkers. Goss glimpsed two furtive forms just outside the door and at first thought they had been pursuing the newcomer. This belief was dispelled as the men outside advanced closer until the bar-rom light touched their faces long enough for him to recognize them as Ancient Days and the man he had known as Big Bones. As if wishing to avoid recognition they stepped out of the lane of lights and did not enter.

The little man sounded an inarticulate cry of disgust and slammed a heavy bag on the bar and announced:

"Everlasting fortune gone to ——! It's no good. Can't do a thing with it?"

Hall nudged Goss and whispered:

"Gabriel Bowen from the oil springs a few miles down the river. Been bragging all summer about owning a pure lead mine. Fussed with it mighty mysterious all the season. Some of the boys tried to trail him but never learned anything except it's somewhere in Wet Mountain Valley."

He broke into a chuckle and nodded toward the window, then said: "By Godfrey! I saw Ancient peeking in. Bet he's been following Bowen."

The white-haired man with southern leanings was now demanding—

"Meaning you ain't got any mine?"

"Look at it!" snorted Bowen, pawing the bag open. "Can't do a thing with it. Any one can see it oughter be pure lead. But when I tried to melt it down for bullets it's too hard. I vow! I don't know what we poor miners are coming to when the stuff we find plays such queer capers."

The bartender picked up a handful of the exhibits and scratched a piece on the bar. His verdict was—

"No good. Harder'n ——!"

"And a season's work thrown away and me needing a grub stake!" wailed Bowen. "Why, good land! I've counted on this stuff as you'd depend on Denver-minted gold pieces. Mister Hall, I'm in hard luck again."

"The account is pretty long, Gabriel, but I won't see you starve," assured the proprietor. "You'd better go back to washing out dust."

"We all oughter know what this stuff is," said the bartender. "Take it over to the new assayer in the morning. It'll be a big satisfaction to learn what it is, now we know what it ain't."

"Ya-ah!" snarled Bowen. "After working all summer to be paid by being told some finnefied name of worthless ore. George, I'm going to sell that mine to you for fifty dollars' worth of grub. "Then hopefully—"Mebbe there's diamonds in it."

Hall shook his head firmly and replied:

"Mining isn't my business. Most the paying mines are lost mines and Ancient Days will locate all of those. The rest are mostly holes in the ground that you can't even use for wells. I'd rather have you owe me fifty dollars more than to own your mine, Gabriel."

Goss stepped to the bar and examined several pieces of the ore. Bowen eyed him eagerly and urged:

"Another may find a fortune where I've lost out, friend. I'm in sore need of fifty dollars besides George's extra credit. I'll put down on paper just how to find that mine or take you to it for fifty dollars."

"I am a gambler. I know nothing about ores," said Goss. "But fifty dollars will never make or break me. If Hall vouches for you I'll pay fifty for the claim. We won't make a secret of it. If any of these gentlemen want to work it before I get around to it they are perfectly welcome. I'll leave the money with Mr. Hall. He'll give it to you after you've written down directions for finding the spot."

The men laughed, amused at the suggestion any of them at the end of the season would waste time on Bowen's secret lode. the bartender did not join in the mirth, however. He rather resented Goss' superior clothes and shiny boots. He persisted:

"Better take it over to the new assayer. He's a hellion at finding out things about rocks."

BOWEN fingered his bristling beard and stared undecided at the black lumps. As he gazed he saw visions, like a crystal gazer. His hopes danced before his eyes in concrete pictures. The pieces of ore took on facets and radiated blue and white lights. With a deep breath he mumbled:

"Thanks, friend. Don't think I'll sell. If it should be diamonds I'd feel cheap to have sold a mountain of them for fifty dollars."

And he hurriedly began replacing the ore in the bag.

Goss asked for beer and invited the company to name their preference, and after finishing his glass stepped outside.

Close by, but hidden by the thirty foot bank, flowed the Arkansas. In infinite space overhead burned the stars, vivid as tiny suns. The light was sufficient for the gambler to detect a figure slipping around the corner of the building. He quickly turned the opposite corner and came upon two men standing by a window.

"It's Nate Goss, Ancient. I saw you and Hasty through the door. I wish to have a word with you."

"You know me but I don't know you," spoke up Hasty.

"Good gracious, Joe! If it ain't Goss, the card player. Who'd thought we'd ever meet down here. Shake hands with him, Joe. He's all right. And, Goss, my friend is one of the best men ever in the mountains. I met him down the valley from California Gulch." And he poked his fist sharply into Goss' ribs. "Now let's step aside but keep near enough to watch this place. You can talk before Joe. No secrets from him."

Hasty accepted Goss as a stranger and the gambler said—

"I'm glad to meet you, Bones."

"Look here, mister. You're gitting acquainted too fast," warned Hasty. "Only friends can call me that, and they know I don't like it."

Ancient poked Goss for the second time and explained—

"It's a foolish nick name Joe don't take to."

"I'm not against nicknames as a rule, but I don't like that one," said Hasty. "It sounds foolish."

"I'll remember, Mr. Hasty. Now suppose we walk over in front of Dr. Reid's drug store."

As they crossed the street Ancient Days kept glancing over his shoulder, and murmured:

"It's that Gabe Bowen. He's located something rich and we allow to be close to the discovery claim."

"His lead mine is a joke. He doesn't know what he found, but it isn't lead. He's very much discouraged," informed Goss. "Offered to sell it for fifty dollars, then decided to have it assayed. But there's nothing there for you to trail."

"I'll be derned!" grunted Ancient. "We'd done better, Joe, to have saved our feet instead of following him."

"Season's too late for us to stay out much longer. We'll happen around at the assayer's place in the morning. You two have your pow-wow while I fill and smoke."

He walked close to the lighted window and whittled a pipe of tobacco. Goss abruptly began—

"You know your ranch down the river?"

"Ought to, seeing it's mine. Joe'n me are going down there soon. He got his senses back about fifteen miles down the Arkansas, or about the spot where he was took by the spell that made him hunt cover in California Gulch. He don't remember anything about being in the gulch. That's why he don't remember you."

"That ranch you own. It's occupied."

"Like —— it is!" fiercely cried Ancient, sucking in his breath with a hissing sound. "I still carry a long knife in my boot. I'll go down and see the dadbusted claim jumper."

"Two of them," continued Goss. "I sent them there. It's the Singing Pilgrim and his sister. He's in trouble and keeping out of sight. The girl came unexpectedly from the east."

For nearly a minute Ancient was speechless.

"The Pilgrim!" he finally exclaimed. "And he's got a sister."

"Young woman. Rather pleasing to look at. But not used to the country, nor our ways. You see it's like this."

And he briefly explained the cause of Ellis' flight from the gulch. In concluding he said:

"Some one killed Skillings, but Ellis didn't. The Rabbit knows who did, but won't tell. Ellis and his sister haven't much money. Your place seemed a good one for them to stay on through the winter. By spring the Skillings killing will be forgotten and the Pilgrim can try to work out of cap and get hold of a stake before taking his sister back east."

It was nearly a minute before Ancient spoke. Then he said—

"You figure they won't be looking for him next season?"

"I feel very sure."

"Mighty thoughtful of you to send them down to my place. Joe'n me will look up another place."

"And you're busted of course?"

"Of course. But George Hall's a pretty good feller. He'll grub-stake us, and now Joe's got back his wits we'll soon be in bonanza. Never was such a cuss as Joe to hound down rich diggings. He ain't hit anything rich yet along of his crazy spells, but he's got it in him. Feel sure the Pilgrim won't be troubled next season?"

"Very sure, if he keeps close this winter. Fetched him down here from Denver where they were looking for him."

"——! As close as that? You'd s'pose they'd give a man a present for killing that skunk. By all means tell him to stay on the ranch and to keep close. And Goss, if any trouble should come to him sort of unexpected, I'd take it kindly if you'd git word to me."

"He'll be all right. But why not sell that ranch to me. I'll buy and give you a chance to buy it back. What'll you take for it?"

"Well, now! Well, now!" excitedly cried Ancient. "That'll be fine for me 'n Joe."

Then regretfully:

"But it isn't stocked or nothing. Just a stout log cabin and some land. I found the cabin deserted and took it over. Built on another cabin and cut a door through. Jesse Frazer lives a mile below me, He says farming will pay. But I dunno. Grasshoppers and everything. I ain't no farmer that's a fact. Frazer says it's good orchard country, but I don't believe it. Still my place is worth something. Land's good as Frazer's and he's raised vegetables and Mexican corn, and did his first plowing with a forked cottonwood. I've told you all I know about the place. Make me an offer. But mind you, the young folks are welcome to stay as long as they like and I'd love to be with 'em."

"Of course. I understand. But with you and Joe there it might be crowded. The young lady will feel better if only her brother is around. I'll give you six hundred for it. You can buy it back for that price after they're through with it."

"Time they're through with it I'll be buying a stone house in Denver with all the eastern fixings. Joe'n me have planned all that out," warmly replied Ancient. "And Goss, you are the handsomest man I ever saw. Even with your back to the light you look like a tall angel. How long do you opine it'll take you to find that six hundred?"

"Just long enough to go inside the store and borrow paper, pen and ink."

"Hooray! Thank —— and Nate Goss, Joey! We're going to eat!"

Hasty quickly advanced. Ancient explained:

"Just struck a small pocket I've been overlooking. Come along and see what the first pan runs."

"We've been living on smoking tobacco for the last day'n a half, mister," informed Hasty as he put up his pipe and eagerly accompanied the two into the store.

Dr. Reid supplied paper and ink and the transaction was soon recorded and witnessed by the doctor. He did not know Goss and glanced at his boots and clothes rather sceptically as he congratulated:

"I'm glad to see our young men go in for land. Frazer is already setting out fruit trees and the valley will soon be producing what the mountains require."

"Nate is one of the slickest card players in Colorado," proudly informed Ancient Days.

"I'm sure he'll find crops and fruit growing and a dairy herd a much better investment in the long run," politely replied the doctor.

Goss was slightly perturbed by the speech. He was recalling Governor Evans' remark, overheard in the Broadwell House when his excellency had characterized gambling as a phase, something transient. Less directly Dr. Reid had said the same thing. After the three had returned to the street Goss sternly told his companions—

"If either of you ever meet up with the Pilgrim or his sister you needn't mention that I ever play cards."

"Hiding your light under a basket," sniffed Ancient. "Such a thing as a man being too modest. But what you say goes. Now we'll go to Hall's and see if we can make Pike's Peak hear us hoot."

"It's a winter's grubstake. Don't throw your money away," Goss said, but having little faith in the restraining influence of his warning.

"I'll watch over him," gruffly assured Hasty. "He sha'n't make a fool of himself this time. Ancient, you hand over half that money. We'll drink t'other half."

"You're hard not to trust me, Joey," rebuked Ancient. "I'm dividing it in the dark." And he halted long enough to separate the gold and script into two portions.

ON ENTERING the saloon Goss excused himself from partaking of Ancient's treat and lost no time in paying for the provisions. Since giving Ellis money at Twin Lakes he had purchased two horses for himself and Euclid and had insisted on Ellis accepting a second loan the night they departed from Denver. These expenditures and loans, added to the six hundred dollars paid for the ranch, left considerably less than a thousand dollars out of the two thousand dollars he had possessed on the eve of leaving California Gulch.

The two thousand had been his reserve fund. When he took from it he was uneasy until it was restored. His vocation called for capital. He never played so shrewdly and successfully, he believed, as when having ample funds. He considered it to be imperative that he increase his capital at once. He spoke again to Hall about the miners camping on Grape Creek.

"They're wild-looking fellows. Showed plenty of dust in paying for their grub and whisky. From their talk I could see they had hit it rich. One of the best crowds in the world for you to keep away from. In the morning they'll ride across to Chandler's Creek, avoiding the valley road."

"Thanks. I'll leave my supplies here and call for them in the morning. If I forget to come back send them down to Ancient's ranch. By him or Frazer or any of the neighbors."

"Now you know better than to do this," remonstrated Hall. "You're too likely a young man to hurry yourself into a hole in the ground or into Grape Creek. I'm mighty sorry I mentioned those fellows."

"That's the best bet on the table," heartily agreed Goss. "Good night."

He was through the doorway, unheeding Ancient Days' pleading that he tarry for just one snifter. He had left his horse hitched in front of the stone house, one hundred feet long, built by Majors and Russell in the flush days before the war and when Cañon City could boast of a larger stock of goods than could be found even in Denver.

He was soon clear of the town, the few lighted houses, and those silent and empty. The Utes' fire on Signal Mountain had burned out. He forded the river and took the Wet Mountain Valley path that led through the Grape Creek cañon.

Matured in the Wet Mountain Valley and garnished with the wild vines that give its name Grape Creek has conquered the red rocks and takes its ease between gently sloping hills as it nears the Arkansas. Under the starlight Goss could discern the shape of these hills clothed with stunted spruce and piñon, as he rode up the creek.

There were stretches of grass, and where the soil was thin and poor there were the sharp points of bush cactus. But the gambler's thoughts were not on the beauties of the starlit hills as he slowly rode, searching ahead for a light and listening for sounds of a carousal.

He halted on hearing the dull report of a pistol. After a few minutes of waiting without the ominous sound being repeated, he rode on. Rounding a curve in the trail he came in sight of two yellowish blurs of light and knew his journey had ended. He dismounted and led his horse forward until he could make out the squat outlines of a log house. Throwing the reins over the low-hanging branch of a spruce he reconnoitered one of the lighted windows.

That there was no tragedy attached to the pistol shot was evidenced by the strains of "Dixie" coming through the glassless window. Also he could hear a man talking loudly and an angry man was swearing vigorously. Some distance from the house he halted and studied that portion of the room framed by the window. He could see the head of a man sitting at a table, facing the window. Closer to the window was a man's back, who was picking up cards.

Satisfied the shot was a bit of high spirits and that he was not stumbling on to a homicide, the gambler returned to the path before the house and gave a hail.

The talking stopped instantly and he heard what he believed to be a rifle barrel sliding over the window sill. Then a voice demanded—

"Who's out there?"

"A wanderer looking for entertainment."

"If there's only one, come in. If there's more'n one, ride like ——."

"I'm alone. I'm coming in," announced Goss, feeling of his left sleeve holster and its deadly derringer.

He threw open the door and stood on the threshold and bowed to several men.

"I heard the sound of singing," he said as the occupants stared at him in silence.

"I am the songster," announced the man at the head table, and he shook back long black hair that fell to his shoulders and gazed sharply at the newcomer.

Goss decided he had never seen a more reckless visage. The expression of wildness was intensified by a scar that extended from from the bridge of the nose to the chin. In healing it had puckered the left eyelid and gave a peculiarly sinister cast of countenance. This individual shuffled the cards expertly, and in a soft, musical voice inquired—

"How many brave lads ride after you?"

"None ride after me or with me. I ride alone," replied Goss.

"You're bound for Wet Mountain Valley?"

"I am more anxious to find card trouble," confessed Goss. "I shall ride till I find it."

"You are properly outfitted?" continued the musical voice.

"I have nearly a thousand. I wish to increase it."

"It isn't much, but it will help. Close the door. Your travels have ended. Take a seat." And he nodded to a small soap box. "My name is De Louge."

"I'm Nathan Goss."

"Gambler?"

"A square one."

"You're welcome till your money's gone. We're playing twenty-five limit, all jacks. When only two hands are fighting the limit can be lifted by mutual agreement. You'll learn the rest of our names as fast as you can remember them."

Goss seated himself at De Louge's left, making six at the rough table. One man was snoring heavily in a corner and another was wild drunk near the fire. The latter was waving a revolver. De Louge, noting the gambler's gaze dwelling on the drunken man, explained:

"He's harmless. Fired his gun into the chimney. Hasn't any more loads. Show color."

Goss placed a handful of gold and a roll of paper money before him and received cards. With scarcely a glance at his hand he passed. The man on his left opened, and he quickly discovered none of the players was under the influence of liquor sufficiently to play recklessly. One round of play gave him some idea of each player's temperament and he found his interest centering on the man opposite. This man crowed like a rooster and boasted of his skill as if wishing to irritate his companions in reckless betting. The money heaped before him showed he had been a heavy winner. As he raked in a small pot he taunted:

"If you'd had nerve to raise me back, any one of you, I'd dropped. I didn't have anything. Makes me laugh to see you boys dig for cover the minute I open my yawp."

"Play your cards and stop your foolishness, Burt. When you lose you'll be ugly enough. And lose you will before the night's over. No man can hold such a streak for long." This from the man at the end of the table on Goss' left.

Burt laughed loudly and warned:

"Next time I'm going to take the rest of your pile, Seth. Luck's with me. Can't stop me. Make it every time I draw, or else bluff you out of it."

On the next hand Goss passed. The man beside him, called "Snap," and opened the pot for five dollars. Seth sullenly entered. The next man threw down his cards and with an oath quit the table and seated himself on the floor with a whisky bottle between his legs.

"Joey's cleaned out like he was when he come to the mountains," exulted Burt. Then he held up two cards and announced—"Four spots, each."

And he placed them face up on the table and challenged—"Hundred on the side I beat any three card draw."

De Louge gently deposited his hand on the discard and murmured—

"You've made most of your winnings on side bets, Burt."

Goss pushed a hundred in gold to one side and murmured—

"I'll try you."

De Louge appeared to be pleased and reminded—

"Newcomers always spoil winner's luck, Burt."

Burt crowed defiantly and repeated—

"Nothing can stop me tonight."

"Play the game," growled Seth.

Goss made it the limit to draw cards. Snap, who had opened, hesitated, then decided to stay. Seth swore violently and dropped out. Burt jeered him for a few seconds, then lost his grin and stared balefully at Goss, but could read nothing in the expressionless face. He hesitated for a moment, then decided:

"Twenty-five more to draw cards. My luck's with me tonight."

Goss, holding a pair of aces, promptly raised back. Snap shrilly protested.

"It's a cutthroat game! Can't even git a chance to draw. Tens and nines opened."

"And you didn't have guts to play them against a pair of four," sneered Burt, pushing in his money but refusing to raise back.

"I ain't scared of you, Burt Damon!" yelped Snap. "It's this new feller who ain't fool enough to show his cards."

Burt leaned forward, waiting for the gambler to draw. He drew a deep breath of relief when Goss called for three cards, and informed:

"Of course I knew you had me beat at the go-in, but I'm a hoss on the draw."

Goss did not look at his cards but stacked them on his pair, while his half-closed eyes watched Burt who snatched at each card greedily and could not hide his exultation on beholding the third.

Goss glanced at his hand and announced—

"Pot's yours."

And he shoved his hand into the discard.

"Scared out!" angrily yelled Burt, throwing down his hand face up.

He had caught a third four. Then he reached out his hand to examine Goss' cards. The gambler caught his wrist with his left hand and with his right deftly mixed the cards.

"I dropped," he reminded.

Burt made no effort to release his wrist, but the whites of his eyes were very conspicuous as he stared into the dark face of the gambler. DeLouge had watched the two with his thin lips twisted up on one side As Goss released his hold Burt hoarsely panted—

"—— you! You placed hands on me!"

"Play the game. When I stick you can see my cards—not when I drop."

Burt rested an elbow on the edge of the table and his chin in his hand and slowly informed—

"I'll look at the next hand you drop if I happen to be curious."

"Play cards," curtly replied Goss. "When we reach that hand we'll discuss it."

DeLouge shook with silent laughter. Seth of the sullen face complained:

"No one can beat Burt. Making good on a pair of fours!"

And he sought to relieve his disgust by resorting to the whisky.

DeLouge chuckled—

"Now you're driving your luck up the chimney by growing angry."

Seth's sour face grew more animated at this suggestion. Burt slowly assured:

"When my luck takes a turn it takes a turn. When it does it'll be worse luck for some one else."

THERE followed several rapid plays with Goss and Burt clashing in two of them. Seth exulted:

"He's hogged a big hole in your pile, Burt. He's busted your luck into smithereens. Now we other fellers stand a show of getting some good cards."

Burt wet his dry lips and glanced stonily at his depleted winnings. The man at the fireplace now reeled to the table, snapping his empty revolver and took a position behind Burt. It was DeLouge's deal, and Goss passed after glancing at his cards and refused to play when Burt opened. On his own deal he dropped out without taking cards. With his winnings savagely eaten into and with his only successful opponent refusing to play two hands running Burt muttered under his breath. Goss had recovered his losses and had added some seven hundred dollars to his pile. When he refused to play the second time Burt told him:

"So that's your game! Waiting for a sure thing. You don't like to take chances. Just come in when you've got them all, eh?"

"That would be safe poker playing," mumbled Goss as he picked up the hand dealt by Snap.

Seth groaned on finding openers and opened against his inclination. Burt promptly raised for cards. DeLouge stayed, as did Goss. Snap threw down his hand and announced he had had enough and, gathering up what remained of his money, quit the game, standing while he completed his deal.

Goss shifted his box down the table to have more room and called for one card, standing on three tens and a queen. He picked up a queen. Seth dropped his hand and retired from the table.

"I'll play these," announced Burt.

DeLouge hesitated and hummed a bit of the old love song under his breath and whimsically remarked—

"Probably cutting open another dog. One card."

Seth started the play for five dollars. Burt promptly raised the limit. DeLouge did likewise. Goss stayed. Burt grinned triumphantly and raised the limit again, and eagerly suggested:

"What about the three of us lifting the limit?"

"Not on your —— luck," murmured DeLouge, seeing the raise.

"And twenty-five more," announced Goss.

"To you!" cried Burt.

DeLouge leaned back and examined his cards, shook his head and carefully slipped his hand into the discard and sorrowfully informed—

"Gentlemen, I am burying the rottenest set of threes I ever held."

"And twenty-five," said Goss.

"To you. What about wiping out the limit?" demanded Burt.

"I have about fifteen hundred dollars in front of me. Bet up to that."

"By ——! At last I've cut your comb, mister man, who don't want folks to see his hand!"

And with feverish haste he pushed forward his money and, without waiting to see Goss' hand, he crowed shrilly and threw down four nines and an ace and started to rake in the pot.

The tipsy man behind him laughed loudly and cried—

"Here's some you're forgetting, Burt."

And he unsteadily thrust a hand into the man's lap and picked up three cards. In the few moments of dramatic silence he cheerfully explained—

"You dropped 'em, Burt, when the stranger was shifting his box to git more room."

Goss spread out his cards and with a quick movement of his left hand and arm drew the money to his side of the table.

DeLouge kicked back from the table, the scar on his face growing livid. Burt screamed like a wild animal and leaped to his feet, at the same moment drawing a bowie knife from his boot. Before a hand could be raised to stay his bloody purpose he plunged the weapon into the side of the grinning drunken man, killing him on his feet. Almost in the same second he wheeled and with uplifted knife lunged across the table to stab Goss. The gambler's hand plucked the derringer from his left cuff and fired as the man was almost upon him.

"What doings are these?" yelled Seth, glaring wild-eyed at Burt, sprawled across the table, shot between the eyes, and then at the murdered man on the floor.

DeLouge's lips crept up on one side, disclosing his teeth.

"This must be settled here," he hoarsely whispered, and his hand sank to his belt.

Goss shifted the derringer to his left hand and covered DeLouge while he drew a heavy gun with his right. Standing, he announced:

"I protected myself. He is still clutching the knife he used in one murder. Keep your hand from that gun, DeLouge!"

For a bit only the snores of the drunken sleeper and the deep breathing of Seth and Snap disturbed the quiet of the room. Then DeLogue softly said—

"You and your hatchet-face! We were peaceful and friendly till you came. We were pards. We came to Colorado together. We were going home together. Now two of us have been wiped out."

"I'm going," announced Goss, turning over the soap box without removing his gaze from DeLouge. With his foot he moved the box under the edge of the table and pawed the gold and paper money into it.

"I'm going, DeLouge. The first move made to stop me will kill you. Your friend stole his hand from the discard. I held the winning hand. He has killed a man and I saved my life by killing him. I'm going, DeLouge. It depends on you if there's to be more killings."

He began slowly backing to the door, pushing the box behind him with his foot. As he maneuvered thus his widely opened eyes seemed to be watching the three men, although his gaze was concentrated on DeLouge.

The box was shoved to one side and his free hand reached behind him and opened the door. DeLogue, bending slightly forward, his twisted lips snarling more broadly, waited for the second when the gun barrel should waver. But the gambler never ceased his cat-like watchfulness as he hooked a foot into the box and worked it over the threshold.

DeLouge's distorted lips wrinkled as he saw the climax almost upon him. For an instant his fierce eyes darted a glance at the square opening that served as a window, and he was prepared to attack the instant the gambler followed the box and closed the door.

But Goss halted in the doorway and commanded—

"Seth, come here."

"Stay where you are," ordered DeLouge.

"Come her with hands up, or I'll shoot DeLouge and then shoot you."

"For ——'s sake go, Seth!" shrilly begged Snap.

"The man's bluffing. He doesn't want any more shooting," said DeLouge. But he did not again countermand the gambler's order.

Seth unwillingly advanced to the doorway, his hands high above his head. Goss spun him about and with his free hand ripped a gun from his belt and tossed it into the darkness behind him. Then he warned:

"If you people want more bloodshed you shall have it. I won fair against a cheat. I killed a murderer to escape from being murdered. Step backward, Seth, and pick up that box."

The man obeyed, and when he stood up with the box in his hands Goss stood behind him, the revolver resting on his shoulder and always covering DeLouge. But the latter was patient. His attack could not be initiated until the door closed. Then he would leap to the window and commence shooting. But the door was left open and he was left framed in the light while the two men backed away into the darkness.

With a yell of rage DeLouge started for the door. The gambler fired, the bullet whistling unpleasantly close to the infuriated man's head and bringing him to a halt.

Seth howled as the explosion deafened him and he all but dropped the box. Entirely reckless of the consequence to himself or his companion DeLouge whipped out a gun and began firing into the darkness. But Goss now had Seth by the collar and was directing his steps down the creek to where he had left the horse. Nor did the man need any prompting now that DeLouge was raking the darkness with first one gun and then another.

They came to the horse and Goss commanded—

"Make for the cabin and step fast."

Seth started running and jumping from side to side as if he were a visible target, and he kept crying—

"Don't shoot, DeLouge! It's me! Don't shoot, DeLouge! It's me!"

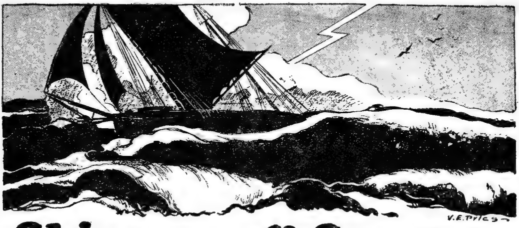
Mounting and holding the box before him Goss rode down the creek path. Behind him cracked guns, rifles now being used as well as revolvers, but the lead was sent by guess. Passing the curve in the trail Goss took time to stuff the money into his pockets and drop the box.

Realizing DeLouge's desperate nature he risked a fall and broken bones by covering the next quarter of a mile more rapidly. When he halted and listened he knew he was not being followed by horsemen. Yet De Louge was a determined man and could be cruelly persistent. Goss had read him quite correctly. He even believed DeLouge might venture back to Canon City to look for him. Therefore, on reaching the Arkansas he rode downstream until two miles below the town before venturing to cross. Then he traveled half a mile from the stream and made a cold camp and sat hugging his knees for the few hours before the east could redden.

"Won more'n two thousand," he told himself. "Cost two lives. A bit over a thousand apiece. Price is too high."

The double tragedy shook his nerve. Death had never intruded on one of his games before.

TO BE CONTINUED



Skippers off Georges

by Warren Elliot Carleton

Author of "The Tangled Warp," "Sword Fishin' ", etc.

LASHED to the wheel of the swordfishing schooner *Pelamon*, the squat frame of Captain Dan Oldham dripped the salt water of combers that crashed over the stern. The seven men of his crew were bound to the fore and mainmast ratlines, awaiting what were likely to be the last moments of the sturdy little fishing vessel.

The West Indian hurricane had caught the *Pelamon* unawares early that afternoon. It came without warning other than a slight drop in the barometer. It had suddenly swept northward—a huge wave, followed by a veritable tornado which brought with it the heaviest seas Captain Dan had experienced in a sailing career of over forty years.

His brown eyes were wide, the severe lines of his masterful, rotund face were grim as an owl's. It was a fighting face—yet, on less serious occasions, it was as genial as that of a boy, whom threescore years had aged only by graying the sparse brown hair a little and widening, somewhat, the plump waistline.

Nor did the men lashed to the ratlines betray their fears by their facial expressions, though terror must have crept into the hearts of them. There was one who showed his white teeth in mocking laughter, though it was not wholly apparent whether it was from diabolic mirth or hysteria.

Most sober of all in the ratlines was the big, broad-shouldered fellow in the blue mackinaw. His heavy brows were contracted, his square countenance was that of a pugilist who is seeking an opening in his antagonist's defense.

But there was no opening in the gale through which the *Pelamon* could strike to shake herself of its deadly embrace. So suddenly had the hurricane swooped down upon her, there had been no time to lower the foresail which, providentially, was the only rag up when the storm broke.

As the great waves smashed down on her stern, nosing her into a hollow and bearing her quivering up on the crest of the succeeding comber, it seemed as if fate alone prevented her from diving into a huge sea and never coming up. If a wave should crash down full on her deck it would swamp her like a lobster pot. The men lashed to the ratlines were well aware of this; Captain Dan expected it to happen momentarily.

But, fighter that he was, deep in his stubborn heart there was hope—hope that came from prayers that had been answered on similar, though less arduous occasions. Occasionally his lips moved.

In the ratlines they were pointing to port. On the crest of a comber Dan looked in that direction. He glimpsed the shadowy form of a two-masted schooner, running with main and foresails up, traveling like a flying Dutchman downwind. A driving rain was now starting in, and to the turmoil of wind and wave was added darkness, which deepened rapidly into the chaos of night, although it was mid-afternoon. Chaos—that described it. It was as if the *Pelamon* and her crew were whirling through space, through an infinite void of endless water, bottomless, interminable.

The neighboring schooner disappeared in the downpour which followed. Not even the flash of chain lightning which pierced the gloom marked her position again to Dan's anxiously watching eyes. He knew that vessel was in a worse fix than the *Pelamon;* lucky she would be if her flapping mainsail did not contribute toward foundering her. He had not seen enough of her to know what type of schooner she was. But he was reasonably sure she was not a swordfisherman, for swordfishermen off the Lightship usually use a riding sail instead of a mainsail. But whatever she was, she was in a bad way—a decidedly bad way.

Through the hurricane, which increased in violence as night came slowly, the *Pelamon* wallowed. Wallowed like a seal, her foresail giving her just enough steerage way for her skipper to hold her hove-to and avoid the deadly trough of the waves which, had she ever drifted into them broadside, would surely have swamped her.

Toward night the wind worked around to the northward. Captain Dan, wearily taking his buffeting at the wheel, noted the change of wind with another fervent prayer—this one a prayer of thanksgiving. For, in spite of the cold which chilled him to the bone, he knew that the worst of the hurricane was over, that the gale which had had its birth on the equator must succumb to the counter current from the arctic, much as a native of tropical climes must sooner or later surrender to the chill of the ice fields if he attempts to combat it in equatorial attire.

It was a little after seven by the nickel watch in the binnacle when Dan cut himself loose from his lashings. The sea still ran high and the wind and rain howled and drummed. But the storm was spent. It was now little more than an ordinary blow.

The men who came on deck from the ratlines made a hasty inspection of the *Pelamon*, Captain Dan joining them. Ike Crowe held the wheel. They found everything intact—no leak, no sign of sprains from stem to stern in the stanch schooner's Maine-built hull. Even the sorely tried foresail had held.

"Thank the Lord!" piously exclaimed Captain Dan, repairing with the others to the forecastle, where they assiduously ransacked the cook's supply of doughnuts, biscuits, and cold corned beef.

"Did ye sight that schooner, Skipper?" asked Mel Frost, the square-faced giant in the blue mackinaw, sitting on the bench which surrounded the interior of the forecastle, a mug of cold tea in one hand and a partly gnawed doughnut in the other.

"She's in for a hard time of it," commented Captain Dan, stuffing the greater part of a biscuit into his capacious mouth. "Did ye git a good look at her, Mel?"

"She looked to me like a swordfisherman turned into a coaster," answered Mel, bolting the remainder of the doughnut. "Looked to me a good 'eal like the *Eva Thomas*."

"The *Eva Thomas!*" exclaimed the skipper. "What the —— would she be doin' out here?"

"What d'ye s'pose she'd be doin' anywhere?" retorted Mel. "With that fool Oliver Thomas skipperin' her? Why, she'd be blowed out o' her course. An' that's how I account f'r sightin' her. Cap'n Oliver, I calc'late, started from New York for Boston, an' was headed for o' Muskeget Channel instead o' goin' through the Sound."

UNDER ordinary circumstances Captain Dan would have been the the first to identify the *Eva Thomas*. For, only last year, at the close of an unsuccessful swordfishing season, the *Pelamon* had collided with the *Eva* in a fog outside Boston harbor. Although the collision was, to all appearances, wholly accidental, Captain Oliver Thomas claimed it was Dan's fault, and he and his father, Captain Ira Thomas, owner of the *Eva*, brought suit against him.

To the amazement of seafaring men, Captain Ira won, and collected three thousand dollars damages from Dan. Coupled with his unprofitable fishing trips of the past six or seven years, this award almost ruined Dan financially. He knew Captain Oliver Thomas had lied in court, and that Captain Ira's crafty lawyers had trumped up the charge of Captain Dan's negligence, which, they claimed, had caused the damage to the two vessels. They didn't tell how the *Eva* had been condemned the previous year as unseaworthy.

As a matter of fact, the *Pelamon's* bow had been crushed in almost as badly as the *Eva's*. Dan still owed the shipbuilders for the repairs on his schooner which the collision had necessitated. And if it hadn't been for Mel Frost, Captain Dan would have gone under financially—that is, if his swordfishing that summer had been as unprofitable as that of the past six years.

But this summer it looked as if the *Pelamon* would be the high-line schooner of the entire swordfishing fleet. Already, on her fourth trip of the season, one hundred and sixteen swordfish carcasses were iced down in her hold. Added to the five hundred and eleven swordfish she had brought to the Boston market on her three previous trips that season, that trip would put her well over the top for the honor which all fishermen covet, along with its splendid financial reward.

And Captain Dan did not keep Mel in ignorance that he and not the skipper was responsible for that season's success. There was a time—it began ten years ago—when Captain Dan was repeatedly high-liner of the New England swordfishing fleet. Then, after reigning as high-liner for four years, the *Pelamon* ceased to bring in the largest catches. Strange that Dan had failed all at once, for he had the same crew—with one exception.

And that exception, in the old crew he had shipped prior to this summer, was the very Captain Oliver Thomas with whom he had collided at sea and in court a year ago. Oliver was in the early twenties when he had sailed with Captain Dan—a dull, unattractive chap, worthless as a fisherman. Captain Dan would never have shipped him had not Oliver's father, Captain Ira, been one of Dan's seafaring acquaintances.

Captain Ira was well-to-do. Captain Dan had been less fortunate. Easy-going and kind-hearted, the skipper of the *Pelamon* had never been able to save much money. He trusted Captain Ira's judgment in business matters, often going to him for advice and reciprocating by selling Ira his fish—for Ira was a fish buyer as well as skipper, his office was in Boston.

So ten years ago, after Dan's first crew had given up seafaring and taken shore jobs, Captain Ira obtained for Dan that crew which until six years ago had made him high-liner. It was a decidedly more efficient crew than his first one from Freetown, the *Pelamon's* decadent southeastern Massachusetts home port. It was that second crew which, ten years ago, had made Captain Dan high-liner of the fleet.

Captain Dan shipped Oliver along with the *Pelamon's* second crew to please his father. But Oliver was always in the way—a pretentious, boastful cub who seemed to be bent on having his own way regardless of others. Dan stood him as long as he could—exactly two seasons. Then he fired him, and in his place shipped Mel Frost, then a green, friendless Bluenose from Yarmouth, Nova Scotia.

The break between Captain Dan and Captain Ira followed the discharge of Oliver from the *Pelamon.* The two skippers had never spoken to each other since that memorable wordy battle—which nearly resulted in fisticuffs.

The rise of Mel Frost, under Dan's and other skippers' tutelage, from one of the clumsiest swordfishermen to the best all-round member of any crew in the fleet is still discussed when schooners speak one another off Georges and Grand Banks, or their crews gather winter nights around blazing wood fires ashore.

How Mel did it, no one can definitely fathom—except that he suddenly found himself. At any rate, Mel stayed in Captain Dan's crew two years, then left Dan and shipped with other skippers. Two years ago he surprized the fishing world by purchasing Captain Thrasher's schooner *Victory*, shipping in her his own crew, and straightway winning the honor of high-liner, with great profit to himself and his shipmates. He had repeated that triumph the following year

But Mel traced his success to Captain Dan's interest in him in those days when the successful Bluenose was only a greenhorn who was scarcely worth his salt. He came to Captain Dan after the swordfishing season the previous year and advised the old skipper to discharge his crew. That was after the *Pelamon's* collision with the *Eva.*

"It's them fellers Captain Ira hired for ye ten y'ars ago," declared Mel, "who are keepin' yer profits down. They were beginnin' to do it when I shipped with ye the fust time. Cap'n Ira has sworn he'd run ye off the water. He's payin' your crew what they're losin' by low shares. He's never gotten over havin' Oliver turned back on his hands."

"But where can I git a new crew?" asked Captain Dan.

"That's what I've come to see ye 'bout," answered Mel, "You're short on funds, but one y'ar o' good fishin' would put ye on your feet. An' you'd have no trouble gittin' a crew after that. So I've decided to tie up the *Victory* f'r one season an' give ye her crew—includin' me. I'll welcome the change; skipperin' ain't wholly to my likin'. An' money never had much attraction for me."

Mel and his crew, true to Mel's word, shipped in the *Pelamon*. They soon proved that Captain Dan's adversities were due to something more than hard luck. Mel's deadly striking of the harpoon and the deftness with which his crew handled ironed swordfish when they hauled them in dories—all convinced Captain Dan that Mel was right.

Mel had been intimate with Captain Ira, too, when he was ashore. There was a rumor that Ira wanted to buy the *Victory*. But it was later said that Captain Ira had behaved like a wild man when he was first apprised of Mel's sailing in the *Pelamon*. Captain Ira had promptly signed Dan's second crew in his big beam trawler *Comber*, a huge steam craft which he owned in addition to the decrepit coaster *Eva Thomas*. The *Comber* had been chasing mackerel that summer off Georges. No doubt Captain Ira was even more venomous than before, since Dan bade fair to be high-liner.

Captain Dan thought of all this during the silence in the forecastle.

"Mel," he declared, rising and starting toward the ladder to climb on deck and study the weather, "without you I never, never would 'a' paid expenses. I ain't much more'n done that the last four years."

"We'll show Luke Carey what he missed," chuckled Mel good-humoredly. "He'll wish he'd stayed with me 'stead o' signin' up with that —— Captain Ira in the *Comber*."

For Luke Carey was the only one of Mel's crew who had dissented when he hauled up the *Victory* and turned his crew over to Captain Dan.

II

"HARD aport! Hard aport!"

Down the jibstay slid Mel Frost into the pulpit at the tip of the *Pelamon's* bowsprit. The mastheader, "Shiny" Morton, had sighted the curved dorsal fin of a swordfish basking in the warm sunlight, the huge fish wallowing lazily in the oily ground swell. The other four men in the three crosstrees of the tall foremast-head took up the mastheader's cry, and at the wheel Captain Dan hopped nimbly, getting the schooner down on the unsuspecting quarry.

Mel, his long-visored black cap pulled down to shade his eyes in the glaring sunlight, picked up the fifteen-foot harpoon pole from the waist-high iron hand rail, and lowered it slowly over the port side of the bowsprit. On the downward-pointing tip of the pole glinted the metal arrow-shaped lily-iron harpoon, from which ran the warp or harpoon line along the starboard rail. Amidships was coiled the great length of the warp, one hundred fathoms, its other end fast to a black buoy-keg.

"Steady!" shouted the men in the masthead.

"Steady!" echoed Captain Dan, twirling the wheel.

Just then the swordfish seemed to scent danger. It moved its tail in a graceful spiral and shot along the surface like a torpedo. There is only one deep-sea creature that can travel with the speed of a swordfish, and that is a porpoise. In an actual race between the two, the swordfish would be championed by more than one of the New England skippers who are familiar with its terrific speed.

If ever a swordfish traveled it was that three-hundred-pounder for whose life blood the crew of the *Pelamon* were thirsting. But the agitated monster made one mistake—a mistake that would have been insignificant with anybody but Mel Frost in the pulpit. It shaped its hurried course to starboard of the *Pelamon*, with a safe margin of approximately thirty feet between it and the swinging pulpit, which Captain Dan was just in the act of bearing straight ahead.

The lily iron flashed as Mel brought the pole up. With a quick motion his great arms raised the pole like a javelin about to be hurled. Only no javelin thrower ever acted with his uncanny speed, ever took such a hasty aim—at least, with any hope of hitting the mark, however large, at which the javelin was to be thrown.

Out flew the pole, darting like a gunshot at the V-shaped wake of a swordfish traveling so fast that the scimitar-shaped fin cutting the surface appeared to be a blurry straight line of black. The men in the masthead watched breathlessly, observing that either by instinct or sheer luck Mel had miraculously timed the passage of the pole through the air with due allowance for the speed of its target. The pole nosed into the water——

"By —— he's got him!" burst out Shiny from the masthead.

Bill Alden, the sleek cook, in white cap and apron, had come up from the forecastle when Shiny first sighted the swordfish, and was paying out the warp hand over hand.

"A solid iron—firm as a rock!" he announced as he threw over the remaining coils and the keg. "I've seen shots with the pole, but never the likes o' that one!"

Mel, grinning with satisfaction, walked along the bowsprit to the fore deck, steadying himself by an overhead line. Ike Crowe was coming down the ratlines, for it was his turn to go out in a dory and haul the ironed fish.

"By gum—that was beautiful, Mel!" the skipper commended Mel proudly, as the big striker walked aft. He was thinking of how Mel had received his instruction in harpooning from him, and giving himself just a small part of the credit for the remarkable shot.

"'Twas luck," declared Mel unassumingly. "D'you mind if I haul him too, Skipper?"

"Mind? Lord sakes, Mel—you're cap'n o' the *Pelamon* this trip," consented Captain Dan. "Any man who's done for me what you have, can do jest about as he —— pleases, fur's I'm concerned."

The skipper was holding the painter to the dory dragging astern. Mel jumped into the little boat, while Ike Crowe looked on, a little piqued that Mel had taken the job of hauling the swordfish away from him. Captain Dan cast Mel the painter, and with long strokes the striker rowed out to the keg and picked it up.

"Go out in the pulpit, Ike," the skipper commanded Crowe. "You do the strikin' while Mel's out." For Crowe was Mel's understudy.

Crowe went into the pulpit, and Captain Dan opened the engine, sending the *Pelamon* ahead in quest of more game. In the dory Mel was skilfully playing the swordfish, while that agonized monster kept in deep water, moving rapidly in its struggling and towing the dory behind it. As long as the fish stayed in deep water and kept in motion, it would slowly drown itself. But if it came to the surface——

Mel began to haul in the warp more and more rapidly. He backed toward the solitary bow thwart, still pulling in the slack line. Captain Dan swung the schooner, encircling the fisherman out there alone in the dory. For the slack line was a danger signal. It meant that, unless the swordfish had torn itself loose from the iron, it was charging the dory sword-first.

Mel fell back, lost his balance, and sprawled on the bottom of the dory. At the same time the little boat rocked violently.

"Christopher sakes!" exclaimed Captain Dan. "Mel's been punched—an' unless I'm mistaken, he's hurt!"

Toward the dory Captain Dan held the *Pelamon*. He saw Mel rise slowly, then sink down again. From the masthead of the schooner the anxious crew scurried down the ratlines. The cook ran aft.

The skipper slowed down the engine as the schooner drew up alongside the dory. Ready hands hustled Mel aboard the *Pelamon*, and Captain Dan hurried amidships to ascertain what had happened. Mel was limping, supported on the stalwart arms of Crowe and Pierre Houde. There was blood around a rent in the right leg of his yellow oilskin trousers.

"Got me in the leg," explained Mel to the skipper, gritting his teeth gamely. "Tagged me before I could git to the thwart."

"Take him below!" the skipper ordered Mel's supporters. "Mel—you hurt bad?"

"Not much, I calc'late," replied the injured man, while Crowe and Pierre helped him into the forecastle. Captain Dan followed them.

* * *

FORTUNATELY, Mel's wound, although ugly, was not fatal, as wounds in the leg have frequently proved to fishermen whom swordfish have punched. While Mel lay on a bunk, the skipper treated the deep gash in the calf muscles with iodine, during which Mel did not even wince at the excruciating pain. The sword, Mel explained, had pierced the bottom of the dory diagonally, ripping through his oilskin trousers and inflicting a glancing rather than a full blow. If it had hit his leg a full blow, it would have torn it to shreds.

"The only danger is that the pizen on that sword may git into yer system," Captain Dan declared after he had patched up the leg as best he could. "That means you'll stay in yer bunk for a spell, and that we'll clear right away for Boston with what fish we've got."

Mel's eyes widened. "Clear for Boston?" he exclaimed. "Why—you ain't goin' to let a little thing like this upset yer plans, are ye, Skipper? You'll do nothin' of the sort! We ain't got half a trip yet."

"We've got over a hundred," said Captain Dan, not reprimanding Mel for his insubordinate words, since Mel had virtually been commander on that trip. "How many more d'you want?"

"As many as we can git in another week's fishin'," shot back Mel. "I went with ye to make ye high-liner, skipper—an' I won't be satisfied till I'm sure I've done it."

Captain Dan half turned away from the bunk, a queer little smile wrinkling his rather comical round face. There was grit for you! A man injured by a swordfish—a man who might have been killed outright—refusing to be taken ashore.

"I'm goin' up on deck to take a look at that punched dory," the skipper told Mel, "then I'll be back." He did not mention running into Boston with their fish. Mel lay back in his bunk and lighted his pipe, and Captain Dan went up the ladder.

The crew had hauled the body of the swordfish on deck, together with the dory, in the bottom of which the sword was so firmly embedded that it could not be extricated handily. It was a sword over four feet in length, and it was driven through the woodwork clean to the gaping, toothless mouth of the fish. Mel's escape from being speared through the abdomen had been a narrow one, indeed.

"Look!" shouted Pierre, pointing to port. Captain Dan's eyes followed Pierre's pointing arm. In the distance a good-sized steam craft was approaching. A little haze rose from the smooth surface of the ground swell, through which the hulk of the single-stacked oncoming craft showed less and less distinctly. As far as the eye could reach, dark blotches dotted the tranquil water, which marked the presence of vast schools of small mackerel and herring.

But fog or no fog, Captain Dan had seen enough of that craft to know that the hurricane had not upset Captain Ira's fishing plans, and that he had ventured out, even if the main body of the swordfishing fleet had not shown up in that locality.

"The *Comber!*" ejaculated Captain Dan. "It's bad enough to have the fog. But Captain Ira an' the fog too! An' that —— Ira in a blunderin' trawler that's as dangerous as a liner in thick weather! ——, these waters are too small to hold us both! Git up in the crosstrees, boys!" to the crew. "We're goin' to run to the nor'ard!"

III

ALL THAT night the fog shrouded the waters of Georges like a great liquid curtain. On deck not even the riding lights were visible. The constant *drip-drip* of water from the rigging kept up monotonously; the deck ran rivulets as in a rain. The watch could not look through that solid mass of demoniac vapor. He was forced to content himself with listening for the warning blasts from onrushing steamships, for the *Pelamon* lay directly in the route of eastbound transatlantic shipping.

Mel had made light of his injured leg during the early part of the evening, and insisted on standing his watch with the others of the crew. Mel seemed to be deeply worried.

"I calc'late Captain Ira's goin' to require watchin'," he told the skipper. "I don't like the idee o' bein' in his neighborhood, he was so cut up 'bout me an' my boys sailin' with you."

"We've left him fur to the s'uth'ard," Captain Dan endeavored to quiet the injured man. "An' you'll stand no watch, Mel. That's one order I won't take from ye."

But Captain Dan stood his watch—and his mind was on the *Comber*. Intently he listened for her weird, shrill whistle. All around the *Pelamon* sounded the warning blasts of passing Europe-bound steamers, most of them far away. He listened to each whistle, trying to fathom the course of the steamer, so as to make sure that it was not headed toward the *Pelamon*.

One seemed to be headed in that direction. Twice it had whistled, the second blast sounding considerably closer than the first. Then came the third *oo-oo-ooh!* of that lugubrious deep-throated voice to starboard. Captain Dan rushed to the binnacle and turned on the small electric light over the compass. With his finger on the compass card he waited anxiously to locate its course by the fourth blast.

While he waited, another whistle sounded—this one between the schooner and the oncoming steamer. It was the piercing wail of the *Comber*.

"Oo-oo-ooh!" answered the steamer, almost from the exact spot whence the *Comber* had whistled. East by north—that was the steamer's course—straight toward the *Pelamon!*

The skipper raced to the forecastle slide, which was open, and shouted:

"Come on—quick! Big one comin' up! Hurry up!"

He dashed back to the wheel and started the engine. Up from the forecastle scurried the crew like rats, their sea boots drawn on, mackinaws and jackets hastily donned. Last of all came Mel, limping after the others in their hurried flight aft.

"Keep yer eyes peeled an' yer ears open!" sang out Captain Dan, holding the wheel and squinting into the opaque fog to starboard. He steered south, sure of the steamer's east-by-north course, but trusting wholly to luck that the invisible monster would whistle again before she loomed up or traveled safely past the *Pelamon*.

Pierre and Ira held the little boxlike foghorn of the schooner on the deck house and pumped out a penetrating little *ya-a-a!* Anxiously all hands listened. The oil-burning engine of the schooner steadily throbbed, the only sound that punctuated the ghostly silence.

"—— that steamer—she ain't whistlin'!" swore the skipper, holding the wheel stationary, his heart pounding in the dreadful suspense. "She ain't——"

Off the bow, close, so close that they could almost make out the vessel itself, echoed the shrill whistle of the *Comber*. Captain Dan swung the wheel west. And from the direction in which the *Pelamon* was headed roared the *oo-oo-ooh!* of the onrushing liner, bearing straight down on the schooner—a mass of crushing steel that would wipe the *Pelamon* from the face of the deep if it crashed into the tiny craft.

Pierre pumped a desperate, appealing blast from the foghorn, a feeble wail for help and mercy that seemed scarcely louder than the twitter of Mother Carey's chickens fluttering around the riding lights. The skipper gave the wheel a slight twist, bearing straight toward the locality from which the *Comber* had last whistled.

The two apparitions of fast-moving lights overtopped by rolling black smoke burst out of the fog almost simultaneously. Straight toward the *Pelamon's* bow raced the *Comber*, and in a direct line toward the starboard side of the struggling schooner bore that arrow of silvery white water cut by the huge steel prow of the ocean liner.

Not a man of the crew moved a fraction of an inch from his position aft, although they knew, as did the skipper, that Death was closing its two hands upon them. The liner did not sheer—it was traveling so fast that it could not have sheered without throwing its passengers out of their beds.

But the *Comber* sheered, and sheered so abruptly that her swinging stern almost sideswiped the *Pelamon*. The schooner's bowsprit grazed the trawler, which was in no less danger from the blind course of the liner than was the frail *Pelamon*, and Captain Ira was bringing his craft about under full steam.

It was probably Captain Ira's maneuver which saved the *Pelamon* from being listed among those New England fishing craft which have been blotted mysteriously out of existence. For the schooner had no sooner plunged into the great wave which the fleeing trawler had left astern than the illuminated portholes and dimly lighted decks of the liner churned past to starboard, so close that for a few terrible seconds it seemed as if the *Pelamon* must be swept under that massive keel by its great suction.

But, as on many another occasion when the *Pelamon's* existence had been threatened by collision with a liner which violates all rules of navigation on the fishing banks, the staunch little schooner bobbed up and down like a bucking horse, wallowed from side to side, with her lee rail under most of the time, and slowly steadied herself while with diminishing blasts of their whistles the *Comber* and the hair-brain-skippered steamer kept up their grim game of hide and seek.

"—— them liners—an' trawlers, too!" fumed Captain Dan, after he had shut off the *Pelamon's* engine and he and the excited crew were recounting the details of the narrow escape they had just had. "It don't do us no good to swear about 'em—but —— 'em!"

IV

AFTER his close shave the night before, Captain Dan was more determined than ever to heave to and head for Boston with his swordfish. Breakfast that morning had been a cheerless affair, for the crew were restless and grouchy, implying by their behavior that they were tiring of the trip and would welcome the skipper's decision to knock off fishing for the season. On deck the fog was still thick, and it would be difficult to sight a swordfish from the masthead.

"Boys," stated the Skipper after breakfast, "we'll knock off today. We've got a good trip o' fish, an'——"

"We ain't got as many as I want," protested Mel, adjusting the bandage on his leg as he rose from the triangular forecastle table. "An' not as many as my boys want—have ye, fellers?" he addressed the crew he had lent Captain Dan for the summer.

"Suits me—this trip does," answered Crowe, and the others seconded Crowe's opinion.

Mel lighted his pipe. "Boys," he said, "where there's mack'rel, they's swordfish. The water's alive with bait. By goin' in now, we're throwin' away good American dollars—the kind that'll buy our folks a good 'eal back home in Novy Scoshy. An' besides, we'd be —— cowards to be bound in now."

"How you make that out, Mel?" indignantly asked Captain Dan.

"Just this," replied Mel, "Ira Thomas is in these waters—an' he knows we're here. An' with him is that —— wuthless crew, Skipper, that kep' you from bein' high-liner. It won't be becomin' for us to go in before we've got a full trip. It'll look like we're runnin' away from him. An' we would be, too. Is they any one here who's scared o' Ira Thomas an' his tribe o' cutthroats?"

"——, no!" "Who'd be scared o' them?" "I'd fight any two of 'em!" retorted Mel's weatherbeaten shipmates.

"See, Skipper?" exulted Mel. "I came out here to make ye high-liner, didn't I? Wal, I hain't goin' to give up till I've done it. An' that means that when the order comes to start for Boston, *I'll* give it!"

Captain Dan's cheeks flushed, his eyes widened, and he gasped, speechless, at this unexpected mutiny of his benefactor. He gradually got his breath, after considerable puffing, and shot back:

"Why—Mel! —— yer hide, Mel! You presum'tious scut, Mel! You're ——"

"Ain't I right, Skipper?" asked Mel with a tranquil smile.

"Right? *Course* you're right!" retracted Cap'n Dan, chuckling while his plump body shook convulsively. "If you want to have a swordfish punch ye ag'in, go ahead an' let him. We'll stay out a spell longer."

He went up the ladder, followed by Mel and the placated, laughing crew. The keen eyes of Shiny and the other men in the masthead had made out swordfish on days that had been just as foggy as this. Shiny's vision in thick weather was positively uncanny. Mel often boasted that the success of the *Victory* the past two seasons had been due to Shiny's almost superhuman ability to sight swordfish on days when most skippers of the fleet knocked off fishing altogether.

So the skipper started the engine, and the men took their seats in the crosstrees. Mel hobbled out to the pulpit, where he sat in the little seat slung from the hand rail, leaning on the pole and scanning the fog-shrouded water while the schooner plunged ahead.

They had ranged thus for over an hour. Mel had ironed two swordfish, which were successfully hauled and killed in dories by Crowe and Pierre. Pierre had just been taken aboard the schooner with the second fish when Shiny sang out from the masthead:

"Starb'ard! Starb'ard! Hard a-starb'ard!"

Captain Dan quickly let out the engine to get steerageway, thinking that another swordfish had been sighted. A *swish* of steam to port—and out of the fog burst the prow of a large ship.

"The *Comber!*" shrieked Shiny. "Hard a-starb'ard!"

But Captain Dan swung the wheel to port. It was a safe bet to dodge liners by heading to one side of them. But the *Comber* was not to be dealt with that way. Dan had had one experience with Captain Ira and his son Oliver in a matter of collision. And he did not trust Ira, if he was in command of the *Comber* as usual, to avoid a second such catastrophe. For, since his court victory over Captain Dan, the skipper of the *Comber* was not too scrupulous to try it again.

So rather than lead Captain Ira on a chase—which would prove to be disastrous in the end if Ira were really bent on running him down—Captain Dan held the nose of the *Pelamon* straight toward the trawler's bow. Mel hastily limped to the fore deck from the pulpit, and the men in the masthead, taking no chances on being caught aloft if the two vessels collided, descended the ratlines like monkeys.

But before they had reached the deck, the *Pelamon* had swung off to starboard of the *Comber*, and the trawler churned past, missing the schooner by a wide margin, Captain Ira taking no chances on bringing his craft about abruptly as he had done the previous night to save her from the liner. And when the trawler had been swallowed astern by the fog, Captain Dan shut off the engine.

"Good lord Christopher!" ejaculated Mel, sitting on the deck house and eying the skipper admiringly. "When it comes to quick thinkin'—you're *there!*"

Captain Dan motioned for Mel to be quiet. He listened until the throbbing of the *Comber's* engines died away in the distance. Then he opened up the engine.

"All right, boys!" Captain Dan sang out. "We'll keep on fishin' now." And to Mel, "I see Captain Ira's game now. He's plannin' to run us down. The —— whelp!"

"He won't—not while you've got your eyes open like you just proved you have," Mel commended the skipper. He slouched forward without another word, and took his place in the pulpit.

Captain Dan was surprized at the tone of disappointment in Mel's remarks. Could it be that Mel *was* disappointed because the *Comber* had failed in what appeared to be the deliberate attempt of Captain Ira to run down the schooner? To all appearances Mel had been Dan's friend, who had sacrificed his season's fishing to put the veteran on his feet financially. But Mel had also been friendly with Captain Ira before the *Pelamon* sailed that summer. And for Mel to show disappointment——

Good heavens! Could it be that Mel was in with Captain Ira on this? That the whole summer's fishing had been a part of Ira's plot to run Captain Dan off the water? Captain Ira was well-to-do; he could easily afford to make Mel's treachery to Dan an object financially. And it had not been likely that Mel had given up his summer's fishing in the *Victory* to put Dan on his feet.

Dan cursed himself for not thinking of that before. He knew Captain Ira's methods; why had Dan been so gullible at Mel's profession of friendship? Now it looked very much to Dan as if Ira had bribed Mel to assure Dan a successful fishing season, then planned to sink the *Pelamon* on her last trip, rescuing her crew handily, they to swear subsequently in court that it had resulted from an unavoidable accident. That was what Mel and Ira had planned when they got together before swordfishing season.

And Mel's eagerness for Captain Dan to keep on fishing proved that Mel had a hidden motive in prolonging the trip. And Luke Carey of Mel's crew was on the *Comber*——

Dan felt strangely sad and alone. There he was, an old man, practically at the mercy of Captain Ira and Mel. For now he was sure that Mel was Ira's confederate. Dan knew he wasn't such a good fisherman as he used to be. But he loved the thrill of swordfishing, even its countless dangers. This was his pay for an honest life, for his kindness to Mel when Mel needed a friend. How could Mel enter such a conspiracy with Captain Ira against the best friend he had in the States?

Captain Dan quickly made up his mind. He would head for Boston at once. If the *Comber* chased him he could give her a merry race, and possibly he could lose her in the fog, although Captain Ira, like most swordfishing skippers, had an uncanny knack of locating vessels in thick weather. He would——

* * *

“DERELIC’ ahead!” Shiny shouted from the masthead. "Port!" Captain Dan swung the wheel to port. Past the starboard side of the *Pelamon* drifted a half-submerged hull, dismasted. Its deck was awash, its stern completely out of sight, its bow riding high and clear of the surface. It was evident that it was the wreck of a lumber schooner, for only a cargo of lumber would permit the derelict to float in that position. The light cargo held up the bow, the heavier stern following the law of gravitation and settling underwater at an angle of forty-five degrees or more.

Captain Dan looked for her name, but it

was obliterated from the hapless vessel's bleached bows. The derelict was the worst kind of menace to navigation, for it was floating directly in the eastbound transatlantic shipping route. The revenue cutter *Massasoit* was to the northward with the swordfishing fleet. It should be reported to her.

"How about salvagin' her, Skipper?" asked Bill Alden, who had come up on deck at the mastheader's outcry. "Looks like a good bit o' lumber she's got in her."

"We will not!" replied the skipper, watching the derelict while the *Pelamon* left it astern. "We're headed for Boston now, an' the sooner we git there, the better —for me," he added significantly.

"For *you?*" exploded Bill. "Lord sakes —it looks like it'd be better for *all* of us— with Ira Thomas aimin' to run us down!"

Captain Dan was half disposed to question Bill on Mel's relations with Captain Ira. Bill was an honest, reliable fellow—at least he appeared to be. That was the —— of it—Mel and his whole crew appeared to be honest enough. But——

"She's comin—the *Comber!* Starb'ard! Hard over there, Skipper!"

At Shiny's excited warning Captain Dan twisted the wheel hard a-starboard and peered into the fog to port. Out of the thickness loomed that menacing prow again. The trawler's engines thrummed and steam hissed, the apparition bearing straight toward the schooner's quarter.

This time the skipper had no alternative but to cut a circle to starboard, depending on the ability of the smaller vessel to be brought about faster than the cumbersome steam craft. No doubt the trawler could travel faster in a race. But Captain Dan's plan was to run before the *Comber*, then execute a quick turn, and scurry out of the steam craft's path, as he had so often dodged out of the course of oncoming ocean liners.

So the *Pelamon* raced ahead of the pursuing *Comber* as a small bird wildly attempts to outfly a hungry hawk. Closer loomed the menacing prow. The trawler was gaining. The engine of the schooner, wide open as it was, could not outdistance the greater power of the steam craft.

Captain Dan gauged the diminishing distance between them. Now was the time. Abruptly he swung the wheel, intently watching the dead-ahead course of the *Comber* astern as he did so.

Another hand grasped the wheel. Captain Dan whirled, facing Mel.

"Skipper — don't do it!" panted the striker, his hands tightening on the spokes of the helm. "Keep on ahead—they can't catch us! Steer for the——"

"—— your soul!" screamed the skipper, relinquishing his hold on the wheel and striking at Mel in his insane fury. "You've overplayed your game, you Bluenose ——! You've——"

"The worst enemy you've got is chasin' you, Skipper!" shot back Mel, wrenching the wheel and holding the *Pelamon* on a straight course. "Let me take the wheel! I'm in command o' this schooner. It ain't mutiny. You made me skipper after the hurricane—an' I've got the crew to back up my evidence!"

Captain Dan, disregarding the *Comber*, which was fairly swooping down on the schooner, looked at Mel with open-mouthed amazement. Too well he realized his folly in putting Mel virtually in command during his unguarded moments of great enthusiasm for the man who had appeared to be his benefactor. Mel was right. It was not mutiny. Mel had received command from him. Ike Crowe would substantiate it.

But law or no law, Captain Dan was not going to see his schooner blotted out of existence before his very eyes, and with him aboard her. He let go of the wheel and tore into Mel with both fists flying.

But although he battered Mel's face with blows that would have stunned any ordinary man, the striker hung on to the wheel, and twisted it slowly to port, putting what little wind there was on the schooner's quarter. The crew, who had come down from their precarious perches aloft in case the *Pelamon* were run down, pounced upon the fiery skipper, and he sprawled on deck under them. They were not obeying Dan. They obeyed Mel, whom Dan had previously put in command.

"Let him up!" shouted Mel. "But see that he keeps quiet. An' some o' you keep a lookout for that derelic'. I think I've got its position about right, but I ain't sure."

Captain Dan was hauled to his feet, Bill Alden and Pierre gripping his shoulders and holding his tense arms. He looked astern. To his surprise the *Comber* had lost distance. The wake of the *Pelamon* proved that Mel was circling to port, racing ahead of the trawler back toward where they had first sighted her just after they had passed the derelict.

Resignedly the skipper watched the race. Too well he could fathom Mel's diabolic plan now. Collision with the derelict would sink the schooner without involving the *Comber*. If he tried to make out in court that the *Comber* had pursued the *Pelamon* he would be laughed down.

Now the *Comber*, previously balked by Mel's change of course, was gaining again. Captain Dan wondered what would happen at the rescue after the collision—whether Captain Ira would even bother about rescuing him. Would he——

"There the derelic' is—hard a-port!" shouted Shiny from the position he had taken for lookout halfway up the foremast port ratlines. Mel got the helm over. Captain Dan edged with his captors toward the port rail so that he could see all that happened.

"Head for her stern—her stern!" yelled Mel at Shiny, and Shiny replied loudly—

"Steady! You're headin' straight for it!"

Now Captain Dan could make out the dark spot a-bow that marked the derelict. He glanced astern. The trawler was within her own length of the *Pelamon's* quarter. And gaining—gaining——

"Hard a-port! Hard a-port!" screamed Shiny.

But Mel had kept the derelict under observation since Shiny had sighted it. He was steering without paying attention to Shiny's commands. Captain Dan's glance shot to the derelict, now lying directly under the *Pelamon's* bowsprit.

Mel gave the wheel an abrupt twist—so sudden that the schooner heeled over and her starboard rail was within a foot of being awash. Water swept that side of the deck. A scraping sound rose from under her keel. She stopped abruptly—but only for a second. Then, steadying herself, she left the derelict astern and sped on a straight course on even keel.

"Good lord Christopher!" exclaimed the skipper, staring at Mel in admiration. "That was the handsomest bit o' maneuverin' I ever see on salt water! That was——"

Captain Dan heard the crash of wood, the sudden escaping of steam astern. So rapt had he been after Mel's skilful passage over the stern of the derelict that he had quite forgotten the *Comber*. Like the others grouped aft, he stared into the fog, and Mel, slowing down the engine, brought the schooner about in a slow circle.

Those breathless fishermen of the *Pelamon* could not make out exactly what had happened, owing to the thickness. But well enough they could imagine. The *Comber* had run slam bang on to the derelict. And the force of such a collision must have punched a good-sized hole in her bottom. A long blast from the *Comber's* wailing whistle confirmed their suspicions.

"She's struck!" shouted Mel in a cold, emotionless voice. "Stand by, all hands. We can't see them poor ——! ——"

"To —— with 'em!" barked Bill Alden. "They're gittin' a dose o' what they'd planned for us!"

And as the *Pelamon* hove in sight of the *Comber*, it was evident that the trawler was in a bad fix. Her whistle still wailing hideously, the steam craft's splintered bow told the story of water that was flooding her below decks faster than it could be pumped out. She had struck hard, with such force that although the contact had been below her water line, it had demolished the woodwork at that point almost to the deck itself, shattering the hull as if the trawler had collided with a vessel its own size or larger.

"Take Luke Carey off, Mel, an' to —— with the rest of 'em!" pleaded Bill. "They've——"

"Need any help?" shouted Mel through cupped hands. There was no answer from the *Comber*. All hands aboard her were working too industriously to heed the proximity of the schooner.

"My ——!" exclaimed Pierre. "She leak like wan lobster pot! Lookit her list! She——"

THERE was a sudden movement aboard the trawler. Men rushed up on to her deck and started to get dories overside. Her superstructure swayed, tilted abruptly. A tremor shook her, followed by a big puff of smoke that rolled thickly from every part of her hull and hung over the damaged ship like an evil black spirit, its widening borders absorbed by the encompassing fog. Mel opened the engine and backed the *Pelamon* away from the *Comber*.

"Her boilers!" burst out Captain Dan. "They've exploded!"

The words were no sooner out of his mouth than the *Comber* lurched dizzily from side to side. Her bow settled like that of a diving submarine. Two dories were slid into the water, but the deck of the trawler hove up with a sudden rocking motion, and the dories were crushed under the *Comber's* careening side before the men could jump into them.

With a hissing sound the bow plunged deeper. Into the sea men jumped, clinging to whatever loose woodwork they could grab. The stern of the *Comber* lifted higher and higher until its big propeller was entirely exposed.

And with a whistling noise scarcely less piercing than the strident prolonged blast of its now silent wail of distress had been, in a great gulf of swirling white water the trawler dived to the ocean depths. The rosette of green and white drew together over the vanished propeller like the mouth of a closed purse, swallowing the *Comber* forever.

While the crew of the *Pelamon* stood spellbound at the frightful sight, Mel swung the schooner toward the spot where the *Comber* had gone down. A big section of wooden wreckage floated past.

"Git busy, boys!" he barked, waking them from their trance.

But Captain Dan already had a boat hook in his hands and stood at the port rail. Pierre and Bill Alden were launching a dory, as were Ike Crowe and Shiny. The heads of men bobbed in the water. Dan got his boat hook into the clothing of one fellow and dragged him over the rail—a badly frightened man of small stature, but uninjured.

"H'lo, Cale!" Captain Dan greeted the rescued man, recognizing him as Cale Smith of his old crew.

But Cale merely gave him a surly look and made himself useful assisting other men in the water on to the deck of the *Pelamon*. All four dories of the *Pelamon* were now out, into which men were fished on all sides of the schooner. For they, experienced deep-water men all, had clung doggedly to whatever floating material they had grasped, knowing that however deep the suction of the sinking trawler drew them, they would eventually bob back to the surface. And most of them had leaped overside from the stern, thereby avoiding the suction or being only partly drawn into it.

"I calc'late ever'body got away," anxiously declared Cale to Captain Dan, "'cause we had to abandon the engine room before the explosion, water filled 'er up so fast."

The growing number of men on deck, who were either hauled aboard by Dan and other rescued men or brought in from the dories, seemed to confirm Cale's belief. Mel watched anxiously while the dories brought in their loads, studying the faces of all the rescued men. And when the last dory came in containing Captain Ira and Luke Carey, Mel's square face brightened.

"Call the roll, Captain Thomas," Mel shouted at the skipper of the *Comber*. Captain Ira was a tall, thin, somewhat stoop-shouldered seafarer in the early sixties, his black eyes and iron-gray hair and mustache lending to his hook-nosed hatchet face the evil aspect of a malign bird of prey.

Captain Ira lined up his men and called off their names without loss of time. Twenty-six answered him.

"All here," he announced to Mel, disregarding Captain Dan entirely. He seemed calm enough, even bold, in the face of the disaster to his prized trawler. A wicked grin wrinkled the tight leathery skin of his sinister countenance.

"I calc'late under the circumstances, Mel, my men can handle the navigatin' o' this schooner an' give yourn a rest."

While Captain Ira was talking, Mel had picked up a spare harpoon pole from the deckhouse.

"I calc'late your offer ain't exac'ly becomin'," the striker answered the skipper of the ill-fated *Comber*. "In the fust place, I ain't the man to be addressed on such a matter, bein' as Cap'n Oldham is still skipper here. Then ag'in, while you an' your bullies are aboard the *Pelamon*, your quarters will be in the fo'csle till we can git ye into port. Luke," he addressed his former shipmate, who was lined up amidships with the *Comber's* crew, "step out here."

"Aye, aye, sir," replied Luke smilingly in the most approved maritime etiquette, advancing toward Mel.

"Now tell what ye know," Mel calmly ordered Luke.

"I'd rather wait an' tell it in court," replied Luke. "All I can say, Mel, is that

I've got about fifty diff'rent kinds o' evidence that Cap'n Ira tried to run the *Pelamon* down. Your plan to have me ship with Cap'n Ira to git that evidence worked too —— well!"

Captain Ira advanced toward Mel with fists doubled up, murder in his evil eyes.

"So that was your scheme in havin' Luke sign on with me, eh?" he snarled. "Well, Mel, that's a game that two can play at. Boys," he shouted at his crew, "take over this ship! We'll man her, an' settle with this bunch o' bullies later."

The men huddled amidships let out a concerted whoop and started to carry out Captain Ira's orders. But suddenly the yell was cut off, and in its place rose a howl of mortal agony. For a yellow shaft shot through the air, striking Sid Barnett's left thigh, and Sid crumpled up on deck. With lightning speed Mel pulled back the pole by its bib line, and clapped another lily iron on its tip from the supply of metal harpoons lying on the deck house.

The crew of the *Pelamon* flew about in lively fashion, grabbing gaffs, harpoon poles, and knives. Led by Mel, they advanced on the twenty-seven fishermen rescued from the *Comber*.

"My leg! My leg! —— he ironed me!" wailed Sid, groveling on deck, abandoned by his erstwhile shipmates as they retreated. For Mel's exhibition of accuracy with the harpoon, which was still embedded in Sid's thigh, had convinced them conclusively of what damage the star striker of the entire fleet could inflict on them, despite his lameness. And Luke Carey held an automatic pistol, its muzzle menacing his late shipmates of the *Comber*.

"I'm here to shoot—an' shoot to kill!" calmly declared Luke.

"Into the fo'csle with ye!" shouted Mel, hobbling in the lead of his shipmates.

Headlong the irresolute men of the *Comber* plunged, one after the other, into the forecastle. Mel slammed the slide shut after them.

"All right, skipper!" Mel shouted at Dan, who stood with the others of the *Pelamon's* complement, a short-handled gaff gripped in his hand, his eyes full of fight. "Take the wheel. Steer back to the wreckage o' the derelic'."

Captain Dan, taking the wheel, steered for a large section of the derelict which floated in the midst of a sea of drifting lumber and bits of wreckage. And as they approached it, the large floating section resolved itself into the square stern of the derelict, which had been left practically intact after the *Comber* demolished the rest of the wreck.

A siren whistle wailed to starboard.

"The cutter!" shouted Luke, pointing in that direction. The fog was clearing away, the sun bursting through it in reddish radiance. Two miles or more away a rakish gray craft steamed toward the *Pelamon*.

"She's answerin' the radio call for help that Cap'n Ira sent out when the *Comber* struck," explained Luke.

Captain Dan recognized the cutter—the coastguard greyhound *Massasoit* which follows the fishing fleet to administer to injured and sick fishermen. And in the distance twinkled the sails of half a dozen schooners. The main body of the Georges swordfishing fleet was ranging southward.

V

THE transfer of Captain Ira and his men to the *Massasoit* had been effected only after lengthy explanations by Captain Dan, Luke and Mel. Probably Luke's displaying of papers which, preserved in a waterproof pocket, proved that he was to be commissioned a water policeman on a Boston police boat at the close of the fishing season had some weight toward influencing Commander Wilkes of the cutter. But Commander Wilkes was a friend of Dan and Mel, and, like many other seafaring men, he was well aware that the court award after the collision the previous year had been eminently unjust.

A hard but kindly seaman, Wilkes sympathized with swordfishermen because he knew what risks they run to make an honest living. So he summed up the arguments pro and con, and decided that it was not only his duty to take the *Comber's* crew ashore, but to arrest her commander as a violator of international law on the high seas.

After the cutter had steamed away with its prisoners, Luke gleefully observed:

"You've got all the cards in your hands, Cap'n Oldham. That crew o' Cap'n Ira's didn't fight us because they'll turn ag'in' Ira in a minute—ain't loyal to him no more than they was to you. They told me themselves on the *Comber* they'd turn State's evidence if Cap'n Ira was ketched in any of his tricks. You can crush Cap'n Ira like——"

"I don't want to crush him," answered Captain Dan. "He's lost the *Comber;* that's punishment enough."

"It ain't enough," put in Mel, hobbling aft. "Because that derelic' was Cap'n Ira's vessel, too."

"What—the *Eva Thomas?*" asked Dan.

But Mel was assisting Ike Crowe in launching a dory. They held back the small boat while Captain Dan brought the schooner up to the large floating section of the derelict. The collision had evidently broken the derelict into several sections, most of which, the buoyant lumber released and now floating on the surface, had gone to the bottom. Apparently there was enough lumber imprisoned in the after hold to buoy up the stern after the *Comber* had, by its impact, demolished the rest of the derelict. Or perhaps the stern was light enough to float when it had been divested of the rest of the weight aft.

"My ——!" exclaimed Shiny, standing with a horrified expression on his face at the port rail. "There's a drownded man on it!"

"I sighted him underwater when the *Pelamon* passed over the derelic'," commented Mel, "an' later after the *Comber*'d cut the derelic' in two."

Captain Dan slowed down the engine; Mel and Ike launched the dory. The men on the schooner watched Mel and Ike cut loose a human body lashed to the wheel of the derelict.

And while they hoisted that inert form on deck, tears came to Captain Dan's eyes as he recognized the distorted features of the dead man.

"Oliver Thomas!" he choked, while his shipmates eyed him, astonished at his emotion—he who looked upon the corpse of a vanquished enemy.

"Look, Skipper!" sang out Mel as he climbed over the port rail and designated with a head jerk the bobbing stern of the derelict.

Captain Dan glanced up from the dead man. His eyes widened. For as the ground swell swayed the mass of wreckage and played over it, he caught the lettering on the stern of what had once been a proud ship. And he read—

VICTORY

"Great Cæsar's ghost!" he exclaimed. "Then it wa'n't the *Eva Thomas*. An' Mel —you *did* sell Cap'n Ira your schooner?"

"Sure did," replied Mel, smiling. "The *Eva* was so unseaworthy after she rammed the *Pelamon* that Ira had to git a new schooner for Oliver. So I let him have the *Victory*—at a fancy price. I reco'nized her durin' the hurricane."

"Why, Mel—are you crazy? You—high-liner—with no vessel o' your own?"

"Sure," replied Mel. "To git rid o' the responsibility o' bein' skipper. I kep' the sale o' the *Victory* a secret from my crew so's they wouldn't up an' sign with some other skipper. I wanted that crew o' mine not only to make ye high-liner, but, like me, to l'arn to admire your seamanship—your kindness —your——"

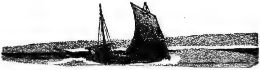
"But that ain't gittin' you a ship for them to fish in," protested Captain Dan. "You ain't got a vessel."

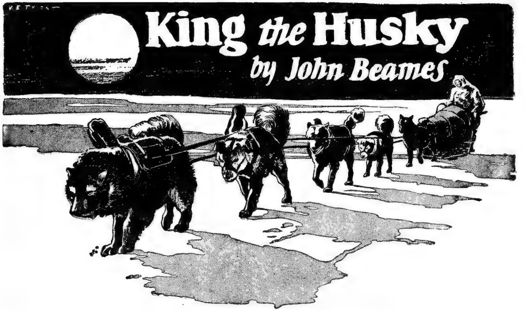
"But *you* have," quickly replied Mel, while his crew looked on. "An' you need a crew—a crew that swore to me while the *Massasoit* was shippin' Cap'n Ira an' his gang that they'd rather sail with you than any skipper of the fleet—an' that they'll side with you if you want to prosecute me for mutiny. But if you'll ship a mutineer an' his old crew—permanent——"

"I'd ship the —— himself if his name was Mel Frost!" vowed Captain Dan, gripping Mel's wide shoulders in undiluted ecstasy. "An' I refuse to take command till that mutineer has fetched the *Pelamon* into Boston! *That's* my prosecution, Mel!"

"Then h'ist the mains'l! Take the wheel, Skipper!" shouted Mel. "We've been high-liners for nigh a week, but I wanted to stay on the Banks till Luke had a good chance to git his evidence. Now he's got it, we're bound to Boston!"

Captain Dan let out the engine and twisted the wheel. The compass turned to north.





King the Husky

by John Beames

Author of "The Dog Without a Tail," "The Last Match," etc.

"ALL I got agen him, he's treacherous."

"Cock-eye" Leary spat tobacco juice in the snow and twitched his eyebrows at "Shorty" Hunt. Then he corrected himself:

"No, not so much that neither—he's independent as a hog on ice. Can't get fresh with him. Outpull any dog in the country, he will, never tired nor lazy, an' don't know what sore feet is. Never need put moccasins on him. Wouldn't want to try. Have a feller eat up an' nothin' left but a wishbone an' a pair moccasins. That's King.

"I wouldn't let on before, but bein' as you've bought him it'd be only right to warn you. You let King pull an' keep off him with the whip, an' let him do what he wants when he ain't in harness and he's your dog till —— freezes. But it ain't no use neither to bulldoze ner try an' be friends. That's what I don't like about him—he's so —— independent."

Shorty Hunt listened and smiled and nodded, but said nothing, while King's late owner continued to ramble on about things in general and the big black husky in particular.

The five dogs, three black and two brown, lay in a string on the snow, harnessed to Shorty's new carriole. They were a fine-looking team, and the little man felt proud of his purchase. But King was the jewel of them all. A smouldering fire gleamed in his yellow eyes, and there was invincible pride in the lift of his massive head.

"See," said Cock-eye, and addressed the dog in hectoring tones, "You King, you lazy, mangy, fleabit houn' dawg you."

Up came King's defiant head, the point of an ivory fang gleaming under a wrinkled lip, and the stiff bristles on his back rising.

"Get it," said Leary, turning back to Shorty. "Three more words to him and he'd have my liver out here on the snow."

Shorty's merry blue eyes twinkled and he laughed.

"Sure looks as if he was all fixed to do it," he agreed.

"Well, there you are. Keep your eye on King an' don't try an' get gay with him, an' you'll be all right. Start any shenanigans an' you or him's goin' to be left on the trail for the wolves to eat. That's all I got to say. Well, good luck to you."

"So long," answered Shorty and whistled to the dogs. "Mush, there, mush," he cried.

King was on his feet, body braced for the starting pull, the jerk that wrenches the runners loose, almost before the words were out of his mouth. The well-trained team were hardly less quick, and in a second they were away at the quick, short trot that eats up the long miles, fifty, sixty, seventy a day. Shorty, his long whip hanging from his wrist and trailing behind him on the snow, settled down to the steady jog, between a walk and a run, of the old dog runner.

Though he was new in that part of the country, he had driven dogs for years in the Yukon and McKenzie basins, and he thought that what he did not know about sleigh dogs was not worth knowing. He had no doubt that, by a judicious mixture of firmness and kindness, he would soon bring King into willing subjection. And he was all the more desirous of bringing it about in that already his heart warmed to the peerless brute.

It was not long before the rest of the team adored him. He treated them with justice, kindness and firmness in the right proportions. It was seldom indeed that he swung his whip, but when he did the long lash bit like a snake. He knew when a dog was tired and when he was merely shirking. He had an eagle eye for sore feet, that bane of the sleigh dog.

After a thaw, when the temperature falls again, every wrinkle in the snow becomes a knifeblade of ice, and dogs with tender feet suffer cruelly. But none of Shorty's team ever had to limp along, leaving bloody footprints on the trail. He was prepared with little buckskin moccasins, and every cut had prompt attention.

But they were never needed for King. He seemed to have feet of iron. The hardest day's mushing over glare ice or through heavy new-fallen snow found him still with head and tail up, pulling for every pound that was in him.

Between him and Shorty there grew up a curious relationship. It was hardly that of master and servant, more that of two equals with little affection but great mutual respect between them, engaged of necessity in a common task. It was Shorty's place to choose the trail, decide the load, the time and place of camping, and to allot the rations. It was King's place to pull the hardest, set the pace, and keep order among his mates. And he did all these things superlatively well.

The other dogs held him in deepest awe. They fought amongst themselves as sleigh dogs will when their master's eye is not upon them, but they left King alone. The merest wrinkling of his lip was enough to appal the boldest. He did not even condescend to associate with them, nor did he stoop to curry favor with his master. In solitary grandeur, eating by himself and sleeping by himself, he dwelt apart.

The coldest night drew him no closer to his mates. And there were some terrible nights; nights when the ice on the lakes boomed and screamed in long rippling, fearsome noises in the rending grip of the frost; when the air stung and prickled in the nostrils, when nothing moved but the ever restless dancers of the north, sweeping fantastically across the vault of Heaven in waves of lambent green and purple and crimson. Through it all King held himself aloof, the rime glistening on his back, and his brooding eyes gleaming out under ice-encrusted brows.

Shorty often wondered what went on in the mind behind those eyes. His own feelings were mixed. He felt he could love King as he had never loved any dog, and dogs were his passion. As some men love women, others power, others beauty, he loved dogs. But it was hard to love King. At times he felt exasperation at his inability to penetrate the brute's iron reserve, but in the main he felt only admiration and respect, tinctured with some of the awe in which the team held their grim leader.

It was a hard winter, a winter of intense cold but little snow. Moreover the mysterious plague that periodically smites the snowshoe rabbits of the North, had been busy, and all the flesh eaters of the wild were hungry in consequence.

In a day's march one would hardly cross a dozen of the fan-shaped tracks, and that of course meant danger from timber wolves. Doubly so because of the light fall of snow that enabled the moose and deer to outrun them. They were reduced to hunting under the snow for mice, and wolves are not so well fitted for that kind of hunting as the smaller carnivora.

SHORTY noted as the winter drew on that they were forming into unusually large packs. They also took to haunting the freight trails on the lookout for scraps left at deserted camps, and that is always a dangerous sign. The fact caused the little man small anxiety at first, for though the Indians hold timber wolves in deep respect, few of the white men of the North have anything but contempt for them. It is seldom indeed that a man is in any real danger from wolves unless he happens to fall sick or be injured on the trail.

But even Shorty at last began to feel uneasy. A big pack was undoubtedly following him, and his dogs, all but King, were growing restless and frightened. They drew close to the fire at night and seemed subdued. They stopped wrangling among themselves, and were perpetually rising to stare into the darkness.

When the fire burnt low Shorty would be roused by a series of whines and snarls which would not subside until he rose and threw fresh fuel on the blaze. Then he would see paired greenish lights moving eerily on the edge of the darkness, and something like a shudder would go through him in spite of all his sturdy courage and scepticism.

But King, curled in a tight ball even in the snow, yards farther from the fire than any of the rest, never even deigned to lift his scornful head. Looking at him, Shorty would feel comforted, and return to his blankets. If King was not frightened why should he be?

The wolves were often to be seen even in the daytime, in twos and threes, generally at a considerable distance, but often on both sides of the trail as well as before and behind. It was not easy to estimate the size of the pack, but there was no doubt that he moved in the midst of a little army of gaunt and starving brutes who were only awaiting a favorable opportunity or until their hunger overcame their fears to attack.

But he held stubbornly on his way, determined not to anticipate trouble until the time came to meet it. He was strongly tempted to take a shot at a wolf now and then, but ammunition is precious stuff in the North, and the brutes were wary, only to be momentarily glimpsed close at hand, and never in the open except at long ranges.

He reached the post in safety and dropped his load, and with nothing but his own gear and food for the dogs, headed southeastward over an unbroken trail to where a load was awaiting him at another post. His way led him through a different and more dangerous country, for whereas the up trail ran mainly across open lakes where the wolves would hesitate to attack him, his new route took him across some rocky uplands, sparsely forested with stunted spruce which provided good cover for his enemies.

All went well for two days, for though he had abundant evidence that the wolves were still close at hand, they made no hostile demonstration. It was a dreary land that he entered upon on the third day, high-lying and bleak.

Jagged masses of granite thrust up through the snow, their tops swept bare by the wind. The thin soil afforded only a precarious foothold for an occasional dwarfed and twisted spruce, but in the hollows grew thick clumps of willow, blood red against the snow. The terrain was much broken by abrupt hills and gullies and the visibility was consequently bad. It was never possible to see more than a couple of hundred yards in any direction, and the willow scrub made ideal cover for his lurking foes.

Shorty noticed that his dogs were even more restless and uneasy than usual, and even King began to show signs of disquietude. The heavy fell on his shoulders bristled and his great fangs were bared at short intervals as he lifted his head and caught the wolf taint on the air.

It was a dull cloudy day with an occasional snowflake drifting down the raw east wind, the temperature about zero. At noon Shorty decided to camp. It had been been hard going all morning even with the half empty carriole, over the unbroken trail with its knife-edged drifts and across patches of bare windswept rock, and the dogs were beginning to show signs of sore feet.

He halted in the lee of a little clump of spruce. Almost at once he became aware that he was surrounded by wolves. The willows around him were alive with movements, and gaunt, fierce heads were lifted from behind every granite outcrop. He had a sudden feeling that the long-threatened attack was about to take place.

"Well, —— it," he muttered with an angry grin, "if they are goin' to start something maybe I'd best let 'em an' get it over with. But somebody 's goin' to catch —— if they do."

He slipped the harness swiftly off the dogs and they promptly crowded round him, every back bristling and every fang bared. Shorty caught up his rifle, thought better of it and exchanged it for his axe as a better and more dangerous weapon at close quarters.

Then the wolves were upon them. They came silently but with terrible swiftness, falling as if out of the air. How many there were Shorty never was able to tell, but there seemed hundreds to his excited vision.

With his back to a tree, his axe gripped firmly in both hands and his dogs in a circle round him, he met them. The battle was joined. On the air rose a bedlam of snarls, yelps, howls, and a ghastly worrying noise. Shorty hewed and slashed madly in the midst of a mass of leaping, raving, gray demons. There were wolves everywhere. His dogs were buried under them, gnashing teeth menaced him on every side.

A big wolf leaped full at his throat. He met it with a slash that split its skull in two halfs, and pivoted on his heel to sink his axe to the eye in the shoulder of another.

A wolf sprang at him from the side and bore him to his knees. Only the collar of his heavy sheepskin jacket saved him from having his jugular torn out. Another wolf caught him by the shoulder. He thrust the handle of his axe between the open jaws of a third. A fourth landed upon his back.

He felt that his end had come. In his extremity he lifted up his voice and called upon the one dog he felt could aid him.

"King, O King," he cried.

And King heard and came. Though locked in a death grapple with a dozen wolves, by some miracle of strength and agility he wrenched himself free and sprang upon Shorty's chief assailant who had him pinned by the neck from behind.

Shorty struggled to his feet. He was blood-mad. Without attempting to defend himself, without any thought but to kill and kill until he was killed himself, he flung himself into the fray, hacking, kicking, cursing, panting, blinded with blood and sweat and fear and hatred and fury. Until upon a sudden he found none to oppose him. The attack had melted away as swiftly and as silently as it had come.

SHORTY sank down dizzily, breathing in sobbing gasps, and gazed with woeful eyes on a scene of utter disaster. On the trampled and bloodstained snow lay a dozen dead or dying wolves and the mangled bodies of four of his own dogs. King only survived, but he was in a piteous plight. He was covered with blood, one of his ears bitten off close to his head, and he lay weakly licking at a gaping wound in his shoulder.

Shorty himself looked like a butcher in a shambles. The axe he still grasped was thick with matted blood and hair, and he himself was splashed with crimson from moccasin to cap. His shoulders and the back of his neck ached from a dozen bites, and the calf of his right leg had been ripped open for three inches or more by a slashing bite from a dying wolf. Of his late assailants, however, nothing was to be seen, though a network of tracks, many splashed with red, led away in every direction.

"Well, King, old scout, reckon we're up against it."

King slowly lifted his head and stared at him. There was no sign of weakness or softening in those flaming eyes. He had come to his owner's assistance when called upon, not, it appeared, from any affection, but from *noblesse oblige*. Had the spirit of the haughtiest of the seigneurs of ancient France been re-incarnated in a dog, this black husky of the North were the fittest receptacle.

Shorty was no match for him in aristocratic and unbending pride, but he was of sound, if plebeian stock through and through. It was not in his nature to give up. Though every movement was an agony he soon had a good fire going, and made shift to dress his wounds. His back and shoulders he could do little for, but though painfully lacerated, the bites there did not seem deep. His leg was another matter, but he bound it up with a spare shirt he had in his pack.

He would have tended King's hurts too, but that the dog would not permit. He did not whine, or flinch, or snap, but he took Shorty's hand gently but firmly in his great jaws and held it fast, growling warningly deep in his throat.

"All right, you old crank," agreed Shorty in affectionate exasperation. "Go ahead and lick it. Maybe you know best anyway."

After he had eaten and rested, the little man considered it time to be moving. There was not the least hope in the world of anybody passing. There probably was not a human being within fifty miles, and the barren upland where he was lay far out of the usual travel routes.

He knew the post lay somewhere to the southeastward, between forty and sixty miles away, and to reach it was his only hope. It was neither desirable nor in keeping with his character to meditate upon the appalling difficulties of the journey in his crippled condition, drawing a sleigh loaded with a heavy and worse crippled dog. For to Shorty's everlasting honor be it said that the idea of abandoning King to be killed by the wolves or to die of his wounds never even entered his head.

Accordingly, and with a great effort, he lifted King bodily into the carriole. The dog seemed for a moment inclined to resent the liberty. No man had dared to handle him so since his puppyhood. But with a low growl and a slight wrinkling of the lip he suffered himself to be hoisted into the sleigh, where he settled down and fell to licking his wound again.

Everything not absolutely essential Shorty left behind, keeping only food for a few days, his rifle, axe and robes. He hoped that the fish he had been carrying for dog food would, with the bodies of the dead dogs and those of their late companions, sufficiently relieve the hunger of the rest of the pack to keep them from attacking him for the time being.

With a last sad look at the dogs he had loved and tended so well and who had served him so faithfully and a muttered curse at the wolves, Shorty bent to the traces and began to plod slowly in the direction of the post.

His leg hurt him cruelly, his shoulders were sore, and the carriole pulled like lead. But keeping to the ridges as much as possible and out of the deep drifts in the hollows, he held doggedly on his way with short intervals for rest until nightfall. Then he camped in a spruce grove and built his fire.

He was very exhausted and in great pain. The only alleviation of his misery was that the temperature continued comparatively mild and that he saw no wolves. He ate a good supper, but King refused food, continuing to lick his shoulder.

"Well, King, you hard old nut," said the little man with a whimsical grin, "you'd better roll in with me tonight. We're both sick men an' we'll help keep each other warm. An' if them —— wolves don't come an' get us tonight, we'd ought to be pretty comfortable. How about it?"

King blinked, but submitted condescendingly to share his master's rabbitskin robe. Shorty, not unnaturally, feeling more than a little lonely and discouraged, ventured to pat him gently on the head, and to even that the husky submitted with unwonted good-nature, though he made no effort to return the caress.

"Well, you sure are one hard old case," said Shorty with a sigh. "But, King boy, you're a dandy scrapper. If them stinkin' wolves show up we'll go out fightin', won't we?"

King lifted his head and snuffed the air, but apparently scented nothing, for he returned to his eternal licking of his torn shoulder.

The night passed in great discomfort for both. Shorty's shoulders and leg ached and throbbed and his snatches of sleep were broken and haunted with dreams of enormous wolves. King twitched and growled all night at his side. Shorty woke feeling tired and ill. King's nose was hot and dry and his temper very short.

With numb and shivering fingers Shorty got the fire going again in the ghost light of dawn, and having boiled himself a big pot of tea and chewed a little bannock that tasted like ashes in his mouth, sat about dressing his leg. The wound was much inflamed and the whole leg swollen, but not so much that he thought he could not walk with it.

King still refused food, but greedily drank some melted snow. Shorty was interested to see him bite off some blades of dry grass that stood up above the snow and chew them up. Then he allowed himself to be helped into the carriole, where he curled himself up and gave his whole attention once more to his shoulder.

SO THE pathetic little procession started again—a crippled man hauling a crippled dog across a frozen and barren wilderness under a gray sky, and with a knife-edged wind lashing them like a whip.

Shorty was ill-equipped by nature for wading through snow. His stumpy legs sank almost to the knee at every step. Here and there were drifts he had to cross, treacherous drifts of which the crust often broke and let him through to his waist in soft snow.

But he was as hard as iron and of indomitable spirit, and he made most amazing time in the circumstances. Despite frequent stops and the pain of his leg he had covered some twenty miles before darkness and exhaustion forced him to halt in a willow thicket.

King's nose was still dry and hot and he could not be prevailed upon to eat, though he licked snow continually and drank thirstily any water that Shorty gave him. His temper, however, had improved. Not that he showed either gratitude or affection, but he permitted himself to be handled without even a growl, and curled up beside Shorty as a matter of course when he lay down for the night.

For Shorty the second night was worse than the first. His shoulders were not quite so painful, but that was more than counterbalanced by the condition of his leg which burned and throbbed and often woke him out of his sleep with a pang of agony.

The third morning dawned fair but chill, with a temperature of twenty below zero, and Shorty was almost frozen before he got the fire lit. But there was a decided improvement in King's condition, and he even languidly chewed up a small whitefish, but he was still unable to walk more than a few steps.

Shorty's leg was at first so bad that he almost despaired of continuing his journey, but after he had bound it tightly from ankle to knee he was able to hobble. Though the first half mile was an agony that brought the sweat out on his brow, the pain gradually lessened and its place was taken by a disquieting numbness.

Fearing that his foot was frozen, Shorty hastily camped and made a fire. When he uncovered his foot two toes and the heel showed a dull dead white. He rubbed the frost bites with snow until the acute misery of their thawing out made him grind his teeth and groan aloud.

Then the leg was bound up once more and the weary journey resumed. He made few miles that day, and night found him far gone in pain and exhaustion. He was all but ready to give up and die. Nothing human could have endured much more.

But there came a gleam of hope to cheer him. King was evidently much better. He got out of the carriole by himself and ate a hearty meal of fish. It seemed likely that he would be able to limp along by morning at least as well as his master, and in that case they could leave the carriole and make a dash for the post together.

Another cheering circumstance was that the wind which had been blowing from the north northwest, veered suddenly just after nightfall to southwest, and began to come in warm, heavy gusts. Shorty welcomed it with profound thankfulness and fell asleep full of sanguine hopes for the morrow.

But he had overtaxed his strength. The horrible dreams of the two previous nights returned with redoubled terrors. It seemed to him that his leg swelled and swelled until it was a mountain at which huge wolves tore and worried with fangs of red hot iron. He tried to escape, but the leg had grown so vast that it held him prisoner, and all he could do was lie and scrabble at the ground in awful agony.

That dream passed, but was succeeded by others, and through them all throbbed pain and fear. Toward morning he became light-headed, and screamed and fought with imaginary terrors. Once he felt certain that he was in the grip of a wolf, and regained momentary consciousness to discover that it was King who had him by the arm in his teeth and was shaking him. He had a vague impression that it was dawn and the weather mild, and then the dog let go of him and he sank into a deep sleep that was almost unconsciousness.

When he awoke it was broad daylight and the March sun was shedding warm bright rays upon him. The air was mild and balmy, and a chinook boomed across the land. He sat up weakly and looked about him. He looked and stared and looked again. King had disappeared.

It was a terrible blow. The treachery, the black ingratitude of the brute was more than he could bear in his weakened condition. Childish tears trickled down his face. Wounded and ill himself, he had dragged the worthless beast in comfort for three days, had shared with him his food and his bedding, and then, when his own strength had in a measure returned, without remorse and without shame the cowardly —— had abandoned the man who had all but given his life for him, and might yet lose his life by what he had done.

He remembered the words of King's late owner, "He's treacherous."

Believing, as every dog lover does, in the unswerving loyalty and fidelity of dogs, Shorty felt that this evidence of callous ingratitude had wrecked his faith in all dog-kind. Yet another example of King's depravity came to light. Not content with deserting his master in his hour of direst need, he had eaten most of the scanty stock of food remaining. Shorty found himself with only about half a hard dry bannock and some tea.

This last discovery had at least the good effect of rousing the little man to action. He was not of the kind who lie down under the blows of circumstance. The knowledge that he was on the verge of death from starvation even if he did not perish from exhaustion and exposure, nerved him to one last effort. He would get up and make a last try for the post even if he fell and died in the snow.

The wound in his leg was better, the inflammation had gone down considerably, though his frozen foot was hideously painful. Moreover, the fever of the previous days had abated, though he felt pitiably weak. He brewed himself some strong tea, ate a portion of his half bannock, bound up his leg carefully, and cutting himself a stout willow staff, took the trail.

He left behind him the carriole, his blankets, even his rifle. His axe he had to take. He needed it to cut firewood, and it would be his only weapon in his last fight if he were again attacked by wolves.

For the wolves were back again. A gaunt brute loped across the skyline into some scrub just as he set out; a prick-eared gray head thrust up from behind a rock to his right.

All that afternoon he stumbled on his way, stopping often for short rests. The low sun sank, but still the blessed chinook swept across the waste. While it blew he would not at any rate freeze to death. Had the temperature been below zero, death would have claimed him early.

Then a big silver moon swung up and gave him good light to travel by.

He decided it was useless to camp for the night; he must press on until he reached the post, which could not be many miles away now. Either that or fall exhausted or be pounced on by the wolves. There were wolves everywhere now, and his imagination created another of every inky shadow the moon cast upon the snow.

They began to close in upon him. No longer did they keep at a distance, they kept pace with him composedly at a few yards distance. There were wolves on the skyline waiting for him, and when he looked back there were wolves slinking along in his very footprints. They did not need to attack. They had merely to bide their time and let their prey wear himself out in vain efforts to escape.

He was moving very, very slowly, hardly moving at all now, and his tired eyes were playing him unholy tricks. It was not only his terrifying pursuers who were endued with motion, the landscape expanded and contracted, stretching itself out to infinity under the rays of the moon or rushing together in one shapeless blur, the low hills climbed on each other's backs to get a look at him, and the skyline waved like a length of water weed in a swift running stream.

He came to the foot of a ridge. It was scarcely a hundred feet high, but it seemed to him to shoot up to the stars like an impassable mountain barrier. He sank down wearily in the snow and asked himself seriously whether it was really worth while to attempt such an arduous climb. The wolves formed a ring around him. They made no sound, but every second that passed found the ring a little narrower.

He was too tired even to be afraid, but the indomitable fighting spirit in him still lived. He raised a feeble shout and shook his axe at them. They drew back a little, and he got dizzily to his feet and stumbled stubbornly up the slope.

But now he felt that the end had really come. A huge wolf, a lop-sided, ungainly, lurching brute, was coming slowly but purposefully straight at him, and behind him at a little distance came a compact dark mass that could only be the body of the pack.

He gave a little grim laugh. Yes, this was the end, but he would fight it out. He went down on one knee the better to brace himself for the onset, his axe poised for his last blow. The great wolf still lopped grotesquely toward him.

He measured the distance with his eye. He could not be quite sure since everything was so blurred and hazy, but he thought another bound would bring the beast within striking distance. He summoned all his failing energies, and swung his axe upward.

"Come on, —— you," he cried.

But the blow never fell, for on a sudden a man's voice answered him.

"Hello, there, hello."

Shorty was stricken motionless with surprise, and in that instant the lame wolf gave a last convulsive bound and was upon him. Man and wolf rolled over in the snow together, the man fighting feebly to keep the fangs from his throat. But the wolf only made curious little eager whimpering noises and licked his face.

Slowly it penetrated into the little man's dulled brain that he was saved; that after all King had proved loyal. He sat up, his arms tight around King, who was boring his nose into his master's breast with soft snorts and whimpers of devoted love.

The wolf pack resolved itself into a team of dogs and a carriole. A man in a policeman's uniform was standing over him.

"Well, here you are, eh?" said the policeman in a hearty voice, assumed to hide his emotions. "Some dog that of yours. Blew into the post around noon today. Wouldn't eat, wouldn't let anybody put a finger on him, wouldn't do a thing but bark and howl and raise the —— until I hooked up and followed him, and him hardly able to put one foot in front of the other. I'd give a million dollars for a dog like that."

Shorty raised a proud head though the tears glistened in his eyes.

"You couldn't have this here dog," he said, "for a hundred million dollars. You King! Oh, you King!"

QUESTING

by Harold Willard Gleason

WESTWARD of the sunset, where the sea is ever blue,
Somewhere sails a galleon, with an ear-ringed, grizzled crew
Living over lives of strife, as deep-sea sailors do,
For moidores, moidores of Spain!

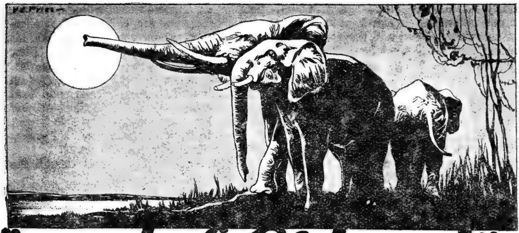
Down the breeze comes cutlas-clash, oath and fetter-clank,
Boom of belching culverin, creak of straining plank,
Shrilling scream of captive maid, splash as bodies sank
For moidores, moidores of Spain!

Click of dice on blood-stained planks, drinking chorus roared,
Snap of skull-flag up aloft, toast of all aboard,
Crash of shattered treasure-chest, and clink of golden hoard
Of moidores, moidores of Spain!

Dawn, and blood-red waves a-swirl, cleft by sharp black fin;
Dusk, and crimp and light-o'-love, ravening tribe of sin,
Quick to follow buccaneers, rolling boldly in
With moidores, moidores of Spain!

How escape the debtor's chains? How forget despair?
How avoid the ghastly dance jigged on empty air?
Ship with Fortune's gentlemen, and seek the beauty rare
Of moidores, moidores of Spain!

Westward of the sunset, those tall ships ever ride,
Manned by blades in lace and rags, poverty and pride—
Gentlemen of Fortune, who lived the life, and died,
For moidores, moidores of Spain!



"—and of Gideon!"

A COMPLETE NOVELETTE By L. Patrick Greene

Author of "The Flame," "Blood and Fire," etc.

MACOMBE slapped viciously at the mosquitoes which were feasting on his fat, naked thighs, then turned and looked up at the gray-bearded counsellors who were grouped behind him.

"As well expect to find wisdom in the bleating of goats as in the words which come from your mouths," he growled peevishly. "A price for everything, you say. That is good; that is wise. But what is the price I shall demand for my country—my cattle—my people? What price shall I ask for the blood of a nation? Au-a! That you do not tell me."

He accepted the pot of beer a woman offered him and handed it to the counsellor nearest to him—an African potentate took very little on trust even before the advent of the white men to his country—and after that man had swallowed two noisy, appreciative mouthfuls snatched the pot back and putting it to his lips did not lower it until it was drained.

"Tchat! That was good!" he exclaimed as he let the empty pot fall from his hands. "What have the white men to offer that is worth, even, a brew of that sort?"

He chuckled happily and then gazed proudly at his warriors who lined the stockade of his kraal.

"And what," he asked, turning to his counsellors again, "what price shall I ask for my warriors—for this small regiment which is gathered here to do me honor—for the weakest man in that regiment?"

"At least, O Earthshaker," a counsellor answered timidly, "you know the price the white men offer."

Macombe scowled as he looked at the white men who were standing before him.

Four of them wore ornate uniforms—silver breast-plates; plumed helmets, tight-fitting red riding-breeches with a wide strip of gold braid running down the seams; white leather gauntlets. Cavalry swords swung at their sides—these and the box spurs they wore on their highly polished riding boots jangled musically when they moved.

The fifth, he stood several paces in front of the others, was a furtive looking, grubby little man. He was dressed in filthy, grease-stained rags; his mouth was hidden by a ragged mustache which straggled down so that it was hard to say where it ended and his beard began; his red-rimmed eyes were watery; he scratched himself continually.

Meeting Macombe's scowl, he smirked self-consciously.

"It is permitted that I speak, O Earthshaker?" he asked.

"I have done little but listen to you talk, O Pig."

"My name is *Umglubu* no longer, Earthshaker. I take again the name that was mine before I came to dwell in this land. These great ones—" he indicated the four uniformed whites—"call me Ferdinand de Sousa!"

"That is all one to me," Macombe said with a contemptuos laugh. "A man once called a hyena a lion, but that same night the beast laughed at the moon—Pig!"

Umglubu—the Pig—known to the police authorities at Lisbon as Ferdinand de Sousa, and wanted by them for several despicable crimes—shrugged his shoulders and laughed feebly at Macombe's joke.

"At least it is permitted that I speak," he asked again when he had recovered his composure.

Macombe inclined his head with pompous gravity.

"This I would say," Umglubu continued breathlessly: "The Portuguese king is all powerful; his soldiers are more numerous than the grains of sand on the river bed and they go to and fro on the great waters in houses spouting smoke. Should a nation annoy him—then that nation ceases to be; its kraals are blotted out, its men-folk killed, the women are given to his soldiers and the cattle are added to his herds. What then, does such a powerful king want with this poor country of Macombe's? Why does he send his most trusted advisors to deal with Macombe?"

"That is something I am still waiting to hear," Macombe interrupted irritably. "Why don't you white men of all tribes remain in your own countries and leave us black ones alone? We have no need of you; we do not sleep or eat better because of your coming. I grow weary of all this. My ears are deafened by the voices of white men who laud themselves and the race from which they came and yet seek to take to themselves this so worthless land of mine. I tell you that I distrust the man who leaves his own platter of mealie-meal and comes to dip his hand in mine—yet praises the excellence of his own. For such a man there is only one reply." He squeezed his nose with his thumb and forefinger and added, "I do not like liars."

The four uniformed men moved uneasily as a native, one of their servants, gave them a garbled translation of Macombe's speech. One of them whispered something to their spokesman. He nodded reassuringly.

"Do not judge too hastily," he said to the chief. "These white men, the mouthpieces of the great white king, do not seek your land, your cattle or the blood of your warriors. They ask only that you and your counsellors make your marks on the talking paper and so proclaim to the world that you and their overlord have entered into a treaty of peace. That done they will see to it that no white men come into your country without your permission. Only these four, and their friends, shall be permitted to come and go as they will. In return for this they will give you many guns and ammunition. And so, with their aid, you will be a great power in the land—no one shall stand before you."

Macombe snorted.

"I have yet to see a white man give so much for so little. Tell me again what the talking paper says."

"Seven times I made known its voice to you yesterday, O Macombe—five times I have made it known to you today. And to what end? The tale of it is always the same; it can not lie."

"Men's memories are shorter than my shadow at noon," the chief said sententiously. "I have forgotten."

Umglubu turned to his companions and from one of them took a roll of parchment. He winked slyly, then, turning to face Macombe, undid the ribbon with which the roll was tied, and smoothed out the parchment, holding it so that Macombe and his counsellors could see the gold-colored seals which were affixed to it.

He took a deep breath, then read swiftly; sounding as if he were reciting a passage learned by heart.

"And," he conluded, "in return for this small favor, I promise to protect—with all the force and arms of my kingdom—the land of Macombe from the grasping hands of all other white nations. In addition I will give to Macombe five thousand rifles, five thousand ball cartridges and much powder. And——"

Followed a list of trade goods well calculated to please a not over sophisticated savage ruler.

Macombe nodded when it was finished.

"It is a lot to give for the little asked; permission to dig a few holes in my country—that is all. What can come from a hole in the ground that can be so valuable in a white man's eyes? Yellow dirt? Tchat! But five thousand rifles—only five thousand, you said?"

"No, six thousand," Umglubu said hurriedly. "Macombe did not hear with open ears."

"I could wish that my friend, the black-robed one, were here to tell me the truth of it all."

"His name is written here, Macombe—" Umglubu pointed to a scrawled signature on the back of the document. "He made his 'voice' here just before he died."

"And the 'talking paper' does not lie?"

Umglubu spread his hands.

"How could it, Macombe? Would 'Blackcoat' have put his voice to a lie? No. What is written, is written. It is surer than the spoken work which cannot be recalled. Macombe and his counsellors agree, then, to make their marks?"

"Not so fast, not so fast. Hurry the ox and it will lie down."

He turned away and after a whispered consulation with his counsellors entered his hut without further speech to the white man.

The uniformed men talked excitedly and when their spokesman joined them reproached him for insisting that they come to the kraal unarmed.

"I don't like the look of the warriors," one said. "And we are helpless. If we had our pistols——"

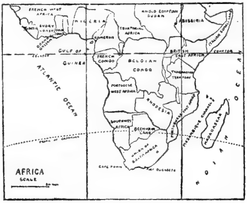
"Your death would be a little slower but just as sure, that is all," de Sousa, the Pig, said scathingly. "But have no fear. They intend us no harm—I know niggers—and Macombe will make his mark yet. It is all right, I tell you. Tomorrow or the next day—what does it matter? To wait a week is a small price to pay for the concession. It is best not to seem too anxious—I know niggers, I tell you. Let's go back to the wagons and, by the ——, take your hands from your swords and look less in fear of your life."

IT WAS noon when a messenger came from Macombe. The white men had discarded their uniforms and were sprawled at ease in deck chairs which their native servants had placed in the shade of a wide branched baobab tree. The man de Sousa was seated on a rock near by, endeavoring to dislodge with a thorn a "jigger" which had burrowed under a toe nail; he was listening to the others talk of theaters and the gay life of Lisbon, with hunger-filled eyes.

"Macombe would speak to you," said the messenger, a wrinkled-faced, gray-bearded native.

"You hear that!" de Sousa shouted. "Macombe wants to see me. That can only mean one thing."

The others jumped to their feet and began to get into their uniforms. The messenger eyed their preparations with disfavor.


FRENCH WEST AFRICA
NIGERIA
ANGLO EGYPTIAN SUDAN
ABYSSINIA
IVORY COAST
GOLD COAST
EQUATORIAL AFRICA
KAMERUN
ITALIAN SOMALI LAND
GULF OF GUINEA
EQUATOR
FRENCH CONGO
BELGIAN CONGO
BRITISH EAST AFRICA
EQUATOR
TANGANYIKA TERRITORY
ATLANTIC OCEAN
PORTUGUESE WEST AFRICA
RHODESIA
PORTUGUESE EAST AFRICA
MOZAMBIQUE CHANNEL
MADAGASCAR
SOUTHWEST AFRICA
BECHUANALAND
TROPIC OF CAPRICORN
UNION OF SOUTH AFRICA
CAPE TOWN
PORT ELIZABETH
INDIAN OCEAN
AFRICA
SCALE

"Tell them," he said, "that Macombe wishes to speak with you—alone."

"Is he going to make his mark?" de Sousa asked the messenger when he had told the others that he was to go alone, and they had reseated themselves, their faces showing great relief.

The native nodded.

"We think it is folly— but Macombe will not be moved. He is like a young bull; he disregards the council of the graybeards."

"He's going to give us the concession,' de Sousa shouted excitedly, clutching at the arm of one of the others. "What did I tell you, D'Andra? And you, you will keep your word? Because of this there shall be no more talk of hangings? I shall be permitted to return to Portugal a free man; a good pension will be paid me, and, ah! There shall be wine and women and——"

D'Andra—he was a tall, thin man; there was a hard cold gleam in his eyes and his well-waxed mustache curled away from a small, cruel mouth—impatiently shook the other's hand from his sleeve.

"I have given my word," he said coldly. "You shall be suitably rewarded, have no doubt of that. But I did not promise to embrace you."

De Sousa scowled.

"You treat me as if I were no better than sewer scum," he said with sullen bitterness. "You remember many things about me that I seek to forget. You think of my black wives and the years I have lived like a pig in this country—lived anywhere to get beyong the reach of the prison and death that awaited me. But—" his face lighted, his voice took on a triumphant note—"you forget that I make it possible for you to take back this concession; without me your mission would have failed. My name will be remembered when yours—D'Andra—is forgotten."

He hurried away up the hill and entering the kraal came to the hut of Macombe.

There he was stopped by armed warriors.

"Macombe sent for me," he said confidently. "Out of my way, dogs."

"He now tells you to rest awhile," one answered, "and sends you beer to drink while you wait."

They forced him to sit on an upturned gourd, gave him a large pot of beer and stood guard over him.

The sun was hot, the beer potent; after a little while he slept.

It was nearly sundown when he was awakened by the sharp points of assegais sticking into his ribs. Looking up he saw Macombe standing before him, surrounded by his counsellors and bodyguard.

"I have slept a long time, Macombe," he faltered.

"Truly—and it is not wise to sleep in the sun. The beer I sent you was, perhaps, too strong," the chief commented solicitiously.

"It was good beer—much better than those wives of mine used to brew."

"It is the custom of wives to brew a heady mixture," Macombe said dryly, then added sharply, "where is the 'talking paper' that I may make my mark on it?"

All sleep left Umglubu's eyes. With a flourish he produced the parchment; from his tattered garments he took an ink-horn and quill pen.

With eager, trembling fingers he pointed to where the chief and his counsellors should make their marks and when that was done he rubbed the inky pen over the ball of Macombe's thumb and pressed it on the parchment beside his sprawling mark.

"The paper does not lie, you say?" Macombe questioned slowly when all was finished.

"No, Macombe."

"And you spoke its words to me?"

"Truly!"

"Au-a! I am still amazed that white men should give so much for so little. Now let us go and bid those others—whose mouthpiece you are—to celebrate the thing we have done. Twelve oxen shall be killed; my young men and maidens shall dance."

Escorted by his bodyguard, his big, powerful hand firmly clasping Umglubu's shoulder, his counsellors following closely behind, Macombe left the kraal and walked slowly down the hill to where the white men had outspanned.

But there was no sign of wagons, or horses or men! Only the gray ashes of fires and a litter of empty bottles and tins, showed where the white men had camped.

Umglubu, Ferdinand de Sousa, the Pig—felt strangely alone and afraid.

Macombe's grip tightened on his shoulder.

"They have gone!" the white man cried in distress.

"Aye—so they have," Macombe agreed heavily. "I had forgotten. They left in great haste—shortly after noon, it was. First I spoke to them, though, through the mouth of one of their black dogs who spoke their tongue and mine."

"But"

"But, why, you would ask? Au-a! They are true men. They do not like liars or deal in lies. When I made known to them that I knew that the 'talking paper' lied they——"

"It does not lie, Macombe!" the white man shouted fearfully.

"Fool!" Macombe said sternly. "Fool to lie—and a still greater fool to judge Macombe a fool! Shall I have Mzila, here—" he indicated the wizened counsellor who had come for Umglubu earlier in the day with the message that the chief wished to speak with him—"repeat what the 'talking paper' said the first time you gave us its words, and the last time, and all the times in between? And if the paper this time spoke of fifty rolls of red cloth, while at that time it spoke of sixty rolls of blue——"

"Mzila is old," the white man began, his eyes shifting constantly, his feet scuffling in the red dust of the veld. Mzila is old and——"

"Mzila lies, or forgets, you would say?" The pressure of Macombe's hand was a torture. "Mzila lies? To what end? Mzila forgets? Au-a! Mzila, who can remember all the years, and the happenings of those years, back to the day when my father's father was born; aye, and before that! Au-a! Be not a fool as well as a liar!

"And so, when I spoke of these things to the white men who dress as great warriors, they acted as great warriors should. They washed their hands of you—O dirty one who has never washed—they denied that you were their mouthpiece; they told their black dogs to inspan and drove hurriedly away. It may be," he added with a chuckle—"that they feared somewhat the assegais of my warriors—they are very sharp and always thirsty for the blood of liars."

He looked at Umglubu with amused tolerance; laughed aloud when the little man tried to squirm out of his grasp; laughed again when the white man, his face livid with fear, shook his fist and screamed; gasped at the curses and blasphemies which tumbled from the white man's lips in a garbled torrent of words—at first the words had no meaning to Macombe but presently—the full portent of the desertion coming home to him—the white man forgot the tongue to which he was born and cursed solely in the language of the country.

"Peace, little one," Macombe said mildly. "You have cause only to rejoice. I have put my mark to the 'talking paper' which I leave in your hands. You still live—and I have not ordered my warriors to kill you. Instead—see how merciful I am—I give you into the safe keeping of your wives. They still have a great regard for you. Their huts have been empty since the coming of those white warriors. They have mourned your absence and wait eagerly for your return to them.

"Go to them—and go quickly!"

He pushed the white man from him with such force that Umglubu fell headlong to the ground. A moment he lay there, whimpering. Then, rising slowly to his feet he gazed helplessly about him until, seeing four women advancing ponderously toward him, he fled howling along the trail taken by the wagons, the women close at his heels.

He did not get far. Soon they caught up with him. He struggled deperately for a little while and then, beaten, thoroughly cowed, he stood meekly in their midst while they upbraided him in loud, scolding voices.

"Guard him well, you black heifers," Macombe shouted.

"We will, O Earthshaker," one of them shouted. She was enormously fat; fat covered and hid her figure as much as if it were a huge, misshapen garment. She was the head wife of Umglubu, the Pig—sometime called Ferdinand de Sousa—and in the lobe of her ear, taking the place of the brass cartridge case which usually adorned it, was the parchment to which Macombe and his counsellors had set their marks. The red ribbon with which the roll was tied dangled coquettishly down to her shoulders.

"YOU wished to see me?"

Don Paulos D'Andra—son of that D'Andra who twenty years ago had tried to win a concession from Macombe—looked up with a petulant frown from the papers he was examining so closely, wiped his hands fastidiously on a white, cambric handkerchief, then leaned back in his chair and thoughtfully toyed with his scented, well-waxed mustache.

"Ah, yes, Gonzales," he said with an affected simper. "I believe I do wish to have a talk with you. Yes."

He nodded as if he had had doubts on the matter but that they were now cleared up.

"It is hard to remember anything in this cursed hole called Lourenco Marques. I shall always regret that we did not sell it to the greedy English. That would be a so-easy way to defeat our enemies: Sell them this so beautiful sea-port; in a little while the garrison will all have died of blackwater and we take the port back again to sell to another empire-grabbing nation. There now," he chuckled, "is not that a wonderful scheme? I will send a memorandum of it to His Excellency the Governor."

The man called Gonzales scowled and tugged impatiently at his gray-flecked beard; his nostrils twitched constantly as if he were trying to detect the source of a cloying odor which pervaded the room.

"You did not send for me just in order that I might listen to your buffonery, did you?" he growled. "You presume too far on the friendship I had for your father." His voice was harsh and there was something essentially brutal in the glint of his eyes.

D'Andra looked up at the ceiling, a mock-pious expression on his face.

"Dear Gonzales," he murmured. "You are so primitive. You talk to me as if I were one of your niggers whom you were preparing to *sjambok*." He brought his watery, blue eyes down to meet the other's beady, black ones. Then he laughed softly and wagged an admonishing forefinger. "It is most gauche of you to bring the manners of the veld into my office. You——"

"One would almost say, 'into your boudoir,'" Gonzales interrupted scathingly, and with a contemptuous gesture he indicated the soft draperies which shaded the window, the soft cushions, the array of toilet preparations and the dainty ornaments which cluttered the room.

When his roving eye saw a bowl of incense which was burning before a jade image in a corner of the room he lost all restraint.

"——!" he roared. "It is that which stinks! When will you be a man?"

He squirted a stream of tobacco juice into the jar, then opened a window at the back of the office with such force that a pane of glass was shattered and tinkled in tiny fragments on the flag-stoned courtyard of the fort.

A gentle breeze fluttered the curtains; a breeze that was heavily laden with manifold odors—and not one of them pleasant—of an ill-kept, tropical city.

D'Andra put a scent-drenched handkerchief to his nose.

"At least you will admit," he said faintly, his voice muffled by the handkerchief, "that the incense was better than this breath of ——?"

"I admit nothing," Gonzales said heavily. "A hyena smells much worse, and a kaffir hut—" He broke off with a snort. "Now tell me what you want and let me go. *Per Dios!* If it were not for memories of your father I would wash my hands of you. What is it this time—more money? What do you do with your pay and the money which importers are always willing to lose in the pockets of a custom official?"

"I am not asking for money, Senhor Gonzales," D'Andra said stiffly, "though that is always welcome and, if you have a little to spare——"

"What then—" Gonzales ignored the hint— "Women?"

"Women I can handle without any assistance."

"That I can well believe. You should understand them fully—at least as well as a woman understands a woman." He cursed under his breath when D'Andra ignored the insult. "Well, what is it," he demanded sharply. "I have much to do. Tomorrow I trek for the country of the Makalanga."

D'Andra sat erect.

"That is Macombe's country," he stated, as one making a great discovery.

"Of course, yes," Gonzales said tolerantly. "You are not quite as ignorant as I thought."

"And you are going there."

"As I have said. I go to escort a so learned professor from the university of Lisbon who believes that he can locate the lost mines of Solomon. A fool's errand; but he pays well and it will be a peaceful change after ivory hunting in the British lion's territory.

"You nearly lost a foster father on my last trip, D'Andra. A mounted policeman missed me by three inches and before he could get his sights on me for another shot I was across the border with all my carriers and a fine lot of tusks. He was a fool not to fire again—even if I was across the border. But your Englishman is always a fool.

"He obeys the laws—except when he breaks them all; even then he appeases his conscience by saying, 'I am the law!'—and so I thumbed my nose at that fool trooper. He cursed and swore and shook his fist at me. But that was all and I posted no guards around my camp that night even though only a little streamlet separated us.

"And now—" Gonzales shoulders shook with laughter—"I return to a district which that trooper sometimes patrols and I shall thumb my nose at him again. He can not touch me for my little professor has letters from the British Colonial office giving his expedition safe conduct; furthermore, it is ordered that we be shown every courtesy and given any assistance we may require."

D'Andra rubbed his hands gleefully together.

"It could not be better; if I had had the planning of it I could not have done better," he murmured.

"What is that?" Gonzales asked suspiciously.

"Wait! I will tell you all in good time. But first tell me about Macombe's country. Do the English own it?"

"No. It is free land. Long ago many tried to get a concession from the chief—but all failed. Your father was one of those who tried; you did not know that? It is not strange. It was not a thing to boast about. Failures rarely are. Still, he was very young then. Ah, well! And so, as I say, Macombe kept his country to himself. But the British, when they took over Lobenguella's country and made it Rhodesia, they unofficially notified the Powers that they would consider any tampering with Macombe an unfriendly act. Naturally—" Gonzales shrugged his shoulders—"Macombe was left alone."

"But they have not proclaimed a Protectorate or——"

"They have done nothing, save assume—they are skilled in such assumptions—that Macombe was their man and was highly appreciative of their moral excellence. One trooper, specially detailed for the task, spasmodically patrols the district; a native commissioner from an adjoining district spares time twice a year to hear complaints at Macombe's kraal and always excuses the natives from paying the hut tax which they had no intention of paying. It is a grand gesture--almost the natives have come to believe that he is showing a most godlike generosity!"

"And there are no white settlers in the country?"

"None—save for a trader who arrived there shortly after your father's expedition."

"And this trader; what is his nationality? Could he be bought?"

"He has no nationality. Undoubtedly he could be bought if occasion demanded it."

"Do you know him, Gonzales!"

The big man smiled.

"No. But his name is Isaacs."

D'Andra made a moue of disgust.

"These Jews! They inherit the earth." Gonzales nodded.

"True! But they are great explorers. First the hunters, then the Jew traders, then the missionaries, and after them—You have heard the old saying?"

"Of course—you are long-winded, Gonzales. Is there a missionary in the district."

"So I have heard—a newcomer."

"He would have his price too?"

"Undoubtedly All men—" Gonzales broke off with an oath. "We gossip like old women," he said irritably, yet looked with renewed interest at D'Andra. That young exquisite seemed to be genuinely interested in the status of Macombe's country. "Why do you ask me all this?"

"I am in the Governor's bad books. He threatens to have me demoted because I was a little drunk the other day."

Gonzales' face hardened.

"Well?"

"And so," D'Andra continued languidly, "I have decided to annex this country of Macombe's and add it to our possessions. Then, when I have been rewarded by high promotion, I shall reprimand the Governor because he—ah—because I do not like the way he parts his hair."

Gonzales threw up his hands in a frenzy of mock despair.

"And I stay here listening to the imbecile ravings of an idiot when I should be getting ready for tomorrow's trek——"

"Wait, Senhor Gonzales," D'Andra said with a simpering laugh. "Calm yourself and read this."

He picked up the document which he had been reading when Gonzales had entered. It was a torn and wrinkled parchment, yellow with age and incescribably filthy.

GONZALES took it and glanced at it casually. Suddenly his body stiffened, his attitude changed from indifference to tense interest. He read it through carefully, examined the signatures, the gold seals and the endorsement on the back of it.

"*Por Dios!*" he exclaimed presently. "It is the concession your father tried to get from Macombe twenty years ago. How did it come into your hands?"

"A filthy beast who called himself Ferdinand de Sousa brought it to me. He had asked to be taken to Colonel D'Andra—but, of course, it was my father he wanted to see. When I told him that my respected father was dead he mumbled something—I didn't understand all that he said. He spoke as if Portuguese was a strange language to him and he interlarded his talk with a lot of queer-sounding native words—to the effect that he hoped my sire was burning in fire—he probably is.

"I also gathered that he had been kept a slave by Macombe for over twenty years. He told a funny story: He spoke a lot of his four wives; they must have led him a life of—he kept looking over his shoulder as if afraid they were coming after him."

D'Andra laughed.

"Yes—a funny story," he continued. "'Specially the part about his escape. It's too long to tell you now. But he got very violent toward the end. He demanded that I give him an outrageous sum of money—threatening to tell every one how my father had played the part of a coward twenty years ago. As if any one cares! I could laugh at that—I felt sorry for the poor——. Imagine, Gonzales! Four wives—and one so fat that she could not walk but had to be carried from her hut and placed in the sun every day. He said she wore the concession in the lobe of her ear. Poor ——! For twenty years he looked at wealth and a mountain of fat. I felt sorry for him until he threw that filthy thing—" D'Andra indicated the parchment Gonzales was still holding—"at me. Then I was forced to call two orderlies and have him ejected. He fought—but they were too strong for him and he was very old. And so——"

D'Andra brushed the palms of his hands lightly together.

"Where is this Ferdinand de Sousa now?"

"He is probably burning in company with my father," D'Andra said lightly. "The struggle with my orderlies was too much for him. He died, noisily, just outside the door."

Gonzales looked curiously at D'Andra.

"Is that a pose," he muttered. "Or are you really as callous as that sounds. If you are—" his eyes narrowed to small slits—"I have great hopes for you."

"Never mind that," D'Andra said impatiently. "Tell me—is that concession worth anything?"

"It is worth everything—worth all that it says—if we can get the British to honor it. It is properly signed, witnessed and endorsed. True, the white men who negotiated it are all dead—but they did not act for themselves but for the crown, and that never dies. Probably, too, many of the headmen who made their marks here are dead. But that does not matter. Neither does it matter that the Jesuit priest who endorsed it is dead.

"That is a matter for congratulation, for he signed the endorsement just before he died, believing that he was signing a letter he had dictated to your father. But his signature is unmistakable; no one will dare to challenge it."

"Then there is nothing to stop us from annexing the country," D'Andra cried exultantly.

Gonzales shook his head doubtfully.

"It is not as easy as that," he said. "Fifteen years ago—even ten years ago—we would only have had to produce this—" he tapped the parchment—"and take possession. But now—it will be very difficult; maybe impossible. The British will not give up Macombe's so easily. Its administration by another power would mean removing Rhodesia still further from a seaport.

"As soon as they hear of this they'll try to prove it a forgery—and it is, inasmuch as the priest did not know what he was signing; and, of course, Macombe didn't. They won't be able to prove a forgery but they'll immediately get Macombe to appeal to them for protection. Remember — they have his ear; they have been on friendly terms with him for many years and our Government is not exactly popular with the natives. Also, the British are, in a sense, in possession and our Government dare not risk coming to an open rupture with them——"

"But international law—" D'Andra began.

Gonzales sneered.

"Possession is nine points of that. You forget that the Big Powers make international laws—we smaller nations obey them. No! It is a wild dream: For a moment I considered it possible. But, after all, that—" he tossed the parchment down on the desk—"is only interesting as a curio, that's all!"

D'Andra smiled.

"For a man who has the reputation of being the cunningest ivory poacher and dealer in black ivory in the country, you are singularly dense. You are unable to make use of the opportunities which present themselves. Do you think that I mean to publish this concession until I have taken possession? Not so. When you leave for Macombe's country tomorrow morning, I shall go with you—you must arrange that for me with the Governor; it shall be said that I have gone on a hunting trip; that you are taking me to—er—make a man of me.

"Our porters shall all be of the military. They will look like porters, yes; but their rifles and ammunition will be hidden in their packs. And, yes. I think it will be possible for us to take, also, two maxim guns. We will disguise them as—what does it matter? It is not necessary to be over clever when dealing with the British. Think how the Boers imported arms, under their noses, in piano frames!

"Further—it is to be remembered that the British have given us free entry and promise us all the aid we desire; they are so eager to advance the cause of science—'specially when there is an outside chance that science may locate rich gold reefs for them."

D'Andra looked triumphantly at Gonzales.

"I was wrong when I called you a fool," Gonzales said slowly. "A little I am beginning to see——"

"Ah! You've caught the scent, eh?" D'Andra cried exultantly. "And so, when we have entrenched ourselves securely—that will be easy; our scientist will have to excavate—we hold Macombe prisoner until he implores the protection of our great government—and that too should be easy; it is rumored that you have most persuasive ways with niggers.

"That done and the rest is easy. We will have the concession plus a peaceful occupation backed up by a request from the chief that we take over his country. The Lion will squeal and growl—but that is all. Public opinion will be against him, and he is afraid of that."

"You are a clever ——, D'Andra. And I believe it will work. In any case, we can't lose. We ought to acquire wealth as the result of this."

PRESUMABLY the two white men were hunting. Each carried a gun—one, a modern, small-bore rifle; the other, an old-fashioned, very heavy, smooth-bored weapon which looked as if it would be infinitely more dangerous to the user than the target he aimed at.

They walked with exaggerated caution, peering constantly to the right and left, parting the bushes with steady, searching hands, taking each step with as much care as if they were walking on eggs. But the silence of their footfalls, their clever avoidance of dried twigs—the snapping of which might give the alarm to some wild creature of the bush—was completely nullified by their incessant chatter and gay, carefree laughter.

At one place they had surmounted a slight rise and all about them the bush had thinned giving them a clear view of a wide valley down the center of which the dark green of the bush was trimmed by a glistening silver ribbon of water; and here they halted and watched a herd of elephants playing in the river shallows.

"Let's go nearer," the man in black said breathlessly.

"Nunno! I vouldn't go any nearer them beasts for anything. My, but they're a sight to watch, ain't they?"

"Pooh! It's safe enough. We could get right up close to them—the wind's right. Come along, Isaacs."

"Nunno, missioner! It might be safe, and then again it might not and, if it vasn't, we vouldn't have no second thought. Besides, it's farther to them elephants than vot you think."

The other nodded regretfully.

"I'd like nothing better than to stay here and watch them. Wish I'd brought my field glasses along."

Isaacs smiled.

"You're a great hunter, you are. How often do you think a lion vould eat if he sat down and watched vonderful sights like that—" He indicated the distant herd of elephants with a flowery wave of his hand. "An' the bush is full of them if a fallow's got eyes to see. An' anyway, you'll have a chance to see them very close pretty soon. We'll have to have a elephant hunt; they are getting too cheeky. They're beginning to take vot don't belong to them. Macombe sent me vord that they're raiding the crops near his kraal at Misongwe. They'll be knocking down the huts next. Vell, let's go on."

As he spoke he placed his heavy gun carefully underneath a bush.

"I'll get it vhen we come back—" his deep, booming voice sounded oddly incongruous coming from such a puny body. "I don't vant to carry it any farther. Anyvay, we von't see no game." He looked up at his black-garbed companion, his black eyes greatly magnified by the strong-lensed glasses he wore, twinkling with mirth. "And I can talk better vithout it," he added.

The other's thin lips twitched in an answering smile.

"When I look at that hideous shirt of yours," he said—it was a vivid crimson with wide, green stripes—"I don't think you want to see any buck. And I don't believe you'd shoot one if you saw one."

Isaacs grinned.

"Maybe not, missioner. But the shirt now! It is a good shirt, ain't it? An' pretty? And, anyvay, about the buck—vhen I wear a shirt like this I give them a sporting chance. They see it, an', if they're wise, they run like ——! for leather and W for waxworks," he added quickly with a supplicating glance at his companion.

"That doesn't help you, Isaacs," that man said triumphantly. "You're fined one shilling."

Isaacs made a woeful face.

"Oy!" he exclaimed. "I'll be ruined. Ten shillings I owe you already and we've only been gone from the store three hours. Vot's a couple o'——?"

"That makes it twelve shillings. I'll be able to get another chair for the mission at this rate."

Isaacs chuckled; then said seriously:

"You ought to be a storekeeper, sure you ought. Vhy don't you come in partnership vith me. Think of the money you'd make? You're a good man vasted; you hadn't ought to be a missioner. That ain't a man's job anyvay an'——"

"The Lord's work is essentially a man's job," the other said with solemn pomposity. Then he coughed and seemed to be greatly interested in a vulture which was hovering high over-head.

Isaacs looked at him slyly.

"Oy! But I'm disappointed in you, Mister Miles," he said. "That you should talk business here! You make me think of stuffy buildings, an' honest men callin' each other liars, an' liars sayin' they're honest. An' for a moment I forget all this." He flung his arms wide to indicate the surrounding country. "Even the shilling you've got to pay me ain't goin' to make up for it. I ought to raise the price. An' that vulture now—he's a filthy scavenger, but he looks pretty up there an' he flies high, don't he?"

The Reverend Mr. Miles looked down at Isaacs.

"I'm sorry," he said simply. "But you trapped me into that. You know you did."

"Sure," Isaacs admitted. "But I can't lose all the time; that ain't good business. ——, no!"

"Thirteen, you heathen!"

They walked on for a while in silence and then Isaacs waved his hands and jumped excitedly up and down.

There was a snort, a padding of hooves and a cloud of dust sprang up from the ground directly in their path. Some bushes swayed as if touched by a gentle breeze—then all was still again.

Miles looked accusingly at the little, bow-legged storekeeper.

"That was a buck, wasn't it?"

"Sure! A kudu bull. He was sleepin' in the shade of the ant-hill. But you couldn't shoot a sleepin' buck—that ain't sportin'. So I made him run for you—Vhy didn't you shoot?"

"You're a funny fellow," the missionary said slowly.

"Oy!" lugubriously. "Maybe I am a little queer. Maybe it is that I have live alone so long vith the natives so that I have come to think and act like them."

"No!" the missionary shook his head. "I didn't mean that. Besides, what native would pass up an opportunity of killing a buck just because it was asleep. No. You act and talk like the white man you are and——"

Isaacs squirmed uncomfortably.

"Never mind that," he said hastily. "But about the buck now. Vhy shoot 'em. We have plenty of food in tins, and chickens. Besides, it's cheaper to talk—ammunition don't cost nothing!"

"All right," Miles assented. "Let us sit over there."

He pointed to a jumble of rocks which fringed a small clearing.

THEY made themselves as comfortable as possible and Isaacs, lighting a cigar, lolled back, his hands clasped behind his head, and puffed contentedly.

Miles, not having yet learned the value of complete relaxation—it is necessary in order for a white man to conserve the strength which Africa constantly and insidiously tries to sap from him—sat erect, his hands clasped about his knees. He hummed softly one of the barbaric chants of the natives of the district; his feet tapped to its tempo.

"About that song, now—" Isaacs said presently.

The humming stopped, but Miles' feet still tapped the savage rhythm.

"Yes?" he questioned eagerly. He knew that the storekeeper was about to give him a dissertation on some strange custom of the people he knew so well. The man's fund of knowledge, his understanding of the black man's psychology, was an unfailing source of amazement to Miles. He knew, too, that without the storekeeper's active assistance his mission would be an abject failure.

But, before Isaacs could continue, a loud snorting noise sounded from a near-by thicket.

Both men sprang to their feet, Miles' gun up to his shoulder, his finger toying nervously with the trigger. They saw a shadowy form making its way noisily through the long grass—saw a tufted tail waving above its back.

"It's a lion," Miles gasped and fired just as Isaacs knocked up the muzzle of his gun.

"What—" the missionary began hotly. Then, "Run, Isaacs!"

He turned himself and made for a tree standing on the opposite side of the clearing, just as the beast came galloping out of the bush. It stopped midway across the clearing and gazed suspiciously at Isaacs, blinking its near-sighted eyes. The little man stooped and picking up a pebble flicked it at the beast. It hit the bush pig on the snout. Turning with incredible speed the beast rushed to an ant-bear hole, whirled swiftly and backed into it. But that hole already had an occupant and the pig, taking the ungentle hint of the tenant, catapulted out of the hole with a squeal and made for another one.

He went into that with even greater speed than he'd already shown, seeming to lunge backward. But the hole was too small for him. His narrow hindquarters entered easily enough—but there he stuck; half in and half out. The expression on the pig's ugly face—an expression of hurt surprize and realization of his helpless position—was too much for Isaacs. He laughed—a shrill, piping laugh—until the tears ran down his plump red cheeks, laughed until his thin legs crumpled up under him for weakness and he sat on the ground, his hands to his sides, seeking to control the laughter which verged on hysterical giggles.

"Go away," he gasped weakly as Miles, looking very shamefaced, his clothing torn in several places—unfortunately the tree he had selected to climb was of a very thorny variety—came and stood over him. "You were so foony," Isaacs continued. "You and the bush pig—look at him."

"You knew it wasn't a lion from the first," Miles said accusingly. "Why didn't you tell me?"

"Vhy didn't I tell you, you ask," Isaacs said between giggles. "You gave me no time. You was in so much of a hurree. You know, missioner, you vas just like that bush pig. First you shoot off at something vot isn't so, and then you go an' climb a tree you can't climb. But you're improving, sure you are. But ain't that pig a good sermon, now? An' ain't he foony?"

A smile broke the missionary's stern expression, the smile became a chuckle, the chuckle a peal of laughter. The bush pig looked at them aggrievedly, looked back over his shoulder to see what was holding him and then squealed an accompaniment to the hilarious laughter of the two men.

"Will—he—be—able—to—get—out?" Miles asked pointing a shaking finger at the trapped beast.

"Sure he vill as soon as he stops squealing and uses his brains. He ain't held as fast as all that. A wiggle or two an' he'll be out. See! He's getting vise already."

As Isaacs spoke the pig stopped squealing and began to paw frantically at the ground under his fore feet. Slowly at first, then with a rush, he managed to extricate himself. Once free of the hole he shook himself vigorously, turned and looked at the hole reproachfully and then, tossing his head, he slunk sheepishly off into the bush, apparently very self-conscious and sensitive to the laughter of the two men.

They were still laughing—quite oblivious to their surroundings—when a horseman appeared suddenly out of the bush and reined his horse to a halt not many feet from them.

HE WAS an elegant creature—a man evidently more accustomed to upholstered divans than the hard leather of a saddle, more accustomed to course dinners than brick-velds, more familiar with the flesh pots than a "billy." The exaggerated cut of his clothes—a romanticized, comic opera idea of what a man should wear on the veld

—accentuated his soft, effeminate appearance.

With one elegantly gauntleted hand resting lightly on his hip, the other tenderly caressing his mustache, he watched the two men for a moment, a sneer on his face.

Presently he spoke—

"You must be mad, I think."

The two men looked up with a start, Isaacs springing to his feet. Then they began to laugh again.

The horseman frowned, bit his bottom lip, flicked impatiently at the swarm of flies which hovered about him and,

"My name is D'Andra, Paulos D'Andra," he said in a cold contemptuous voice. "I am not accustomed to having pigs laugh at me."

Isaacs hid the interest he felt in the slight foreign accent in the man's voice.

"Softly now," he muttered and put a soothing hand on Miles' sleeve as that man was about to make a heated retort. The missionary did not like being called a pig; neither did Isaacs, but—

"Oy," he said. "Don't get angry, mister. We vasn't laughing at you. Nunno! We was a laughing at a bush pig vot got stuck in an ant-bear hole. He vas very foony. You would have laughed yourself had you see him. First he tried to get into a hole vot already had somebody in it, an' then he tried to get into a hole vot was too small for him. An he got stuck—an' he vas very foony."

Isaacs beamed at the man who called himself D'Andra, as if hoping to find an answering twinkle of mirth in that man's eyes. Seeing only suspicious resentment there, he continued in almost apologetic tones, "I ain't jokin', mister. If you don't believe me, ask the missioner here. His name's Miles—Mister the Reverend Miles. Mine's Isaacs, Joseph Isaacs—though most people call me 'Big Un.' That's because I'm so small, maybe. The English are very foony, ain't they? You Portuguese, ain't you? On a huntin, trip, no? You——"

D'Andra waved his hand impatiently. "No. We do not come to hunt. We have come on a scientific mission—to locate the lost mines of Solomon. We intend to stay at your store tonight—of course you're Isaacs, the storekeeper?—and tomorrow we go on to Misongwe to go through the formality of asking the chief—Macombe, isn't it?—for permission to dig."

Isaacs nodded and Miles—he had been stubbing his toes in the dirt, trying to overcome his instinctive dislike of D'Andra—now looked up with interest.

"And I suppose you will also," Isaacs said slowly, "go through the formality of asking the storekeeper for permission to stay at his store?"

"Oh, you," D'Andra scoffed. "Why should we do that? You, of course, have your price which we will pay. That is all there is to that. You naturally sell hospitality as you sell trade goods to niggers."

Again the pressure of Isaac's hand on his arm prevented the missionary from making a hot retort.

"Sure," Isaacs agreed complacently. "I have my price—a man must eat. How many are there in your party?"

"Two other white men and one hundred and fifty porters."

"——!" Isaacs looked quickly at the missionary whose lips formed "fourteen." "Vot you goin' to do with all them? An', anyvay, you don't expect me to feed all them, do you?"

"Oh, no," D'Andra said airily. "Senhor Gonzales—he's in charge of the expedition—believes in allowing the carriers to live off the country we pass through. They can take care of themselves at some near-by kraal. What they want—they'll take."

"You mean that you don't pay for the grain and stuff your porters take from the kraals," Miles asked hotly.

D'Andra looked at him with amused contempt.

"Naturally not," he replied with a shrug of his thin shoulders. "Why should we?"

"Macombe von't like that," Isaacs said gravely. "Maybe he von't give you permission to stay in his country vhen he hears of it."

"We stay whether he gives us permission or not," D'Andra said indifferently. "We have letters from the British Colonial Office giving us all the permission we need. If Macombe is at all temperamental, why—we shall use force."

"Oy!" Isaacs nodded his head as if in hearty agreement with such measures. "That's different. A nigger ain't got no right to say vot a vhite man should do in his country. But how about me?" he added in grieved tones. "If you don't pay for all the stuff your porters take, how can the niggers make deals with me? Vhere do I stand?"

D'Andra laughed.

"*You.* ——! Who cares anything about the affairs of a lousy little —— of a Jew——"

"That's quite enough from you," Miles said in a cold, quiet voice. He shook off Isaacs' restraining hand. "If you don't apologise to Mr. Isaacs at once, I'll pull you off your horse and beat some courtesy into you."

D'Andra stiffened and turning in his saddle looked back to see if the rest of his party was in sight. But his eyes met nothing save a seemingly endless vista of bush —unbroken, unrelieved by any moving thing. He turned back.

"I am very sorry, Mr. Isaacs," he mumbled in ungracious tones. He flashed a resentful glance at Miles.

"That's all right," Isaacs hastily assured him. "Vot you said vasn't anything to me. Of course the missioner didn't like it, but me, I knew you vas only joking. An' now, mister, I've got a proposition to make. I'd like to get things ready for you an' your friends—hot vater for baths and a good meal. They'll be along soon, von't they?"

D'Andra nodded.

"They can't be far behind. I rode on because I wanted to be the first to get a decent bath."

"Oy," Isaacs exclaimed admiringly. "An' you rode on alone in a strange country just to get a vash first. My! You might have got lost."

"The trail is wide and well defined," D'Andra said contemptuously.

"Sure it is. But it takes a man vot knows to follow it. Now me!"

He spread his fingers and hunched up his shoulders until they nearly touched his large, outstanding ears. "Turn me around just once an' I'm lost."

D'Andra smiled sourly.

He was clever enough to take Isaacs' sycophantic flattery for what it was worth but he was not clever enough to realize the storekeeper was deliberately helping him to arrive at an absolutely incorrect estimate of his character and ability. In Isaacs, D'Andra saw just what the little man wanted him to see: A fawning, cringing storekeeper, with no thought above making as big a profit as possible in all his dealings; a man who meekly accepted insults in the hope of being able to sell his insulter something at twice its value.

Certainly, D'Andra thought, their mission had nothing to fear from the storekeeper. About the missionary, he was not so sure. He decided that it would be wise to get into that man's good books, to try to wipe out the unfavorable impression he had made. If he didn't, Gonzales would be very angry. D'Andra shuddered slightly. He was afraid of Gonzales who had assumed complete charge of the expedition from the time it left Lourenco Marques. And he ruled with an iron fist. His *sjambok* was busy all day long and once he had even threatened D'Andra. That was after he had seen D'Andra conversing too familiarly with one of the native porters.

"Remember," he had said then, "our policy on the trip is severity toward niggers—always that; always show them the mailed fist and no glove on it! No exhibition of softness! What we want, we take, but we must be on friendly terms with all the whites we meet in Macombe's country and on the way up, at least until we've gained out objective. After that—" He had shrugged his shoulders. "But don't forget my order, D'Andra, unless you wish to taste the kiss of my *sjambok*."

Remembering all this, D'Andra smiled wistfully at Isaacs and then at Miles.

"As a matter of fact," he said humbly, "I was lost. I think that the reaction I experienced at finding you gentlemen and knowing that I was safe, is the explanation of my ungraciousness. Again, Senhor Isaacs—" he bowed—"a thousand pardons."

"That's all right, mister," Isaacs assured him. "You vasn't insulting. But now, as I vas saying. It vould be nice if I could go ahead and get things ready for you. But it's a long vay, an' my legs are short, an' I can't valk very fast. But now—you von't think me cheeky?—supposin' you let me ride your horse up to my store an' you valk up with the missioner—then I could have everything ready for you."

D'Andra hesitated a moment.

"All right," he said finally. "I'd like to walk up with you, sir," he turned to Miles,—"if you'll permit it. Undoubtedly there is much you can tell me about this country that will make our investigations much easier."

He dismounted and courteously held the stirrup for Isaacs to mount; Miles assisted in the process by giving Isaacs a leg up. In the scramble the storekeeper's cap fell off but he appeared to be unconscious of it.

GRABBING hold of the reins, "Get up!" he yelled, drumming his heels on the beast's ribs. The forward plunge of the horse almost unseated him, but with an effort he recovered himself and waving his hand gaily he trotted off, bouncing ludicrously from side to side. Then he remembered his cap.

"Vait a bit," he bellowed and sawed at the reins, pulling his horse back on to its haunches. "My cap, missioner. It fell off! Oy! This hot-headed —— won't stand still."

Miles picked up the long peaked cap and ran over to Isaacs with it. Under cover of much yelling at the horse and its rearing and plunging, the two men exchanged a few whispered sentences and then, yelling like a mad man, Isaacs gave the horse its head and rode swiftly away.

"Por Dios!" D'Andra exclaimed with a wry smile. "He will ruin my horse and perhaps break his own neck."

"I must confess," Miles said slowly, "that I think you were very rash to accede to his extraordinary request."

At that moment, however, secure in the knowledge that he was well out of D'Andra's sight, Isaacs sat down in the saddle and rode as he well knew how to ride. The most meticulous riding master could have found no fault with his hands, though he might have been inclined to object—purely on the grounds of form, not of technique—to Isaacs' crouching seat.

Presently the trail he was following began to rise gently, winding its way about the hill on the top of which he had built his store, and half an hour later he came to a small, well-ordered kraal. The huts were all neatly thatched, the pathway to each door was picked out by whitewashed boulders and about the whole place there was an air of orderly cleanliness entirely foreign to most kraals; here was none of the objectionable features white men usually associate with native villages; there were no evidences of a white man's civilization—no empty bully tins, and broken down chairs cluttering the place.

None of the natives wore the discarded raiment of some white man. Save for the whitewashed stones, the absence of filth, nauseating smells and mange-eaten curs the kraal was most truly a native one.

In this kraal—Isaacs spoke of it as "my kraal" to people he liked—the men and women dressed as had their forefathers; they cultivated the ground with similar tools, hunted with similar weapons and—absolute evidence of Isaac's influence over them—made fire by rubbing two sticks together. His trading—and he did little of that in these later years—he did with the other kraals of the district.

As Isaacs rode through the kraal he was hailed affectionately by men and women; fat, naked littles urchin ran after him, crowing with delight when he called to them by name.

Coming to the hut of Tomasi, the headman, he dismounted and talked for a time to that old graybeard. Then, mounting again, he rode up to his store.

IT WAS noon the following day. Isaacs and Miles were seated on on the wide stoop surrounding the store house watching the long column which wound its way slowly down the hill side.

Isaacs looked very tired and dirty. Down the front of his flamboyant shirt was a large muddy stain; his black hair hung down over his forehead; his face badly needed the attention of a razor; one eye was slightly discolored. He bit savagely on an unlighted cigar—but, apart from that, he seemed to be completely relaxed: His chin was resting on his chest and he seemed to have withdrawn into himself.

Miles' rust-black suit—Isaacs called it a uniform—was neatly pressed as usual, yesterday's tears had been cleverly darned, his choker collar was immaculately white, his pith helmet—it was resting on his knees—had been freshly blancoed.

He had shaved that morning, but a row of scratches on his cheek and chin showed that his hand had not been too steady and his flaming red hair was parted a tenth of an inch to the right of its usual line. His blue eyes flashed angrily and he kept beating the heels of his clenched fists together as if in that way he would work off the nervous energy and indignation which possessed him.

Isaacs lighted his cigar, inhaled luxuriously and then, leaning back in his chair, his hands clasped behind his head, completely relaxed.

"It was very foony," he said and chuckled softly.

Miles sprang to his feet and paced nervously up and down the stoep.

"Funny, Big Un!" he ejaculated. "You can call it funny! I think its scandalous—no, it's worse than that, it's tragic. I shall send a messenger at once to Trooper Dixon."

"I've already done that, missioner. I did that last night. And I sent another one, riding my horse, to Inyati. He ought to be there in three-four days, easy."

"But why to Inyati, Big 'Un. We don't want the whole troop of police up here. Dixon can handle those fellows alone. All that is necessary is for a man in authority to tell them a few home truths. A man in a uniform can sometimes do more than fifty in plain clothes."

"Vell, yo've got one," Isaacs commented dryly. "Oh, ——, never mind vot I said then. I sent to Inyati for more police boys—maybe because I vanted to give them a chance to have a little visit with me, or perhaps—to tell you the truth, missioner, I don't know vhy I sent for them. Something seemed to tell me to, that's all."

Miles looked at him and shook his head doubtfully.

"You are a funny fellow, Isaacs," he exclaimed. "I think that I know you well and then you go and do something like this affair last night. I never know what I should believe. Now last night—"

Isaacs laughed.

"That was very foony!"

Miles frowned.

"I wish you'd be serious," he expostulated. "How can you joke about it? The way that sneering, brutal Gonzales and that horrible little cur of a D'Andra treated you made my blood boil. If you hadn't made me promise not to blow off I'd have told them a lot they need to hear.

"No, Isaacs. I don't understand you. Why, man, you accepted their insults and blows as humbly—humbly, do I say? Why, man, you crawled most abjectly. You were—" he hesitated— "the sort of a man I thought you were when I first came here. You even laughed when D'Andra threw a mug of beer in your face."

"An' vot could I have done—thrown it back?"

"No; I don't mean that. But, you see, the way you acted and looked laid yourself open for just the sort of treatment men of that type would give you. Goodness, Big 'Un. I don't know when I've seen a more degrading, beastly spectacle than the one you presented last night. And the food! And the way your 'boys' dressed and stunk! No. You've got to tell me all about it—I'm unable to puzzle it out for myself."

"It vas all very foony," Isaacs insisted doggedly.

"And I suppose you call the way Gonzales beat some of his porters funny? I suppose you think the way he treated poor old Tomasi because they couldn't find any provisions, funny? And the way the porters, with D'Andra at their head, went through the huts looking for women—That I suppose was the greatest joke of it all?"

Isaacs' eyes flashed.

"No," he said slowly. "That vasn't foony—but it vas foony that they couldn't *find* any provisions or women, vasn't it? An' vhen I think how they couldn't find any grain at the kraal and had to buy it from me at my price—vhy, then I chuckle and laugh. Ha, ha!" He looked up at the missionary.

"You see, missioner," he continued, "I didn't like the look of that D'Andra an' I didn't believe the little he said. An' so I make a reason for vhy I should ride on ahead and leave him to valk with you. An' that you found foony, not?"

"Yes," Miles agreed reluctantly. "I wish you could have seen him when he got stuck in the mire—and of course it wasn't my fault! I was so sure I knew a short cut to the store, but, then, it's so easy to get lost. And he walked and walked, and he was frightened and tired—his pointed shoes hurt him—that gun of yours was so heavy but I insisted on him carrying it. . . . Yes, that was funny all right. Well, go on."

"Vell, as I say, I didn't trust that young man or those he said vas with him—something here, inside me, warned me to be on guard. An' so I rode to the kraal and told Tomasi to send the vomen away with the grain, an' goats, an' chickens an' everything. Then, I gave orders that the kraal should be made dirty. I don't think that took them very long. Twenty years I've been hounding those people yet if, for one week, I miss inspecting—Oy, the filth! An' then I came on up to my store here an' my boys made it look as them white men vould think a store kept by a man named Isaacs ought to look."

"But why? I still don't see why?"

"Missioner," Isaacs replied solemnly. "Vhen I meet a man who pretends to be something vot he ain't—vhy then, I do the same. An' so I looked as I looked, an' my boys were dirty, an I stuck candles in their own grease on the table so we could see to eat—an', an' I gave 'em goat to eat which vas very high and tough; an'," he concluded triumphantly, "I charged them a high price for everything."

"But what are they if they're not what they seem to be, Big 'Un? The old professor's a harmless soul, anyway. He hasn't a thought in his head beyond his theory regarding the ancient workings. He was bewildered by the actions of the other two; he was contemptuous of them, and, at the same time, afraid. And so for the other two, I don't like them. D'Andra's softly vicious, Gonzales a brutal monster. There was no pretence about them: They were just what they were. The sooner they're through with their research work the better I'll be pleased. But they can't do any lasting harm."

Isaacs shook his head.

"I'm not so sure, missioner. It ain't the men themselves I'm afraid of, I only vonder if they're really looking for Solomon's mines."

"You saw the professor's letter from the British Colonial Office——"

"Sure! But it vas *his* letter—not Gonzales, or D'Andra's. I'm just a big fool, maybe, but I'm afraid of them men, missioner. I wish I could talk the Portugal talk—then I vould know vot the big man, Gonzales, said to that D'Andra vhen D'Andra said to me—he was quite drunk—'I'll hang you and your niggers when I've taken over—'An' that's as far as he got, missioner, for then Gonzales caught him by the neck and shouted at him, and D'Andra vas very frightened."

"An' I vould like to know vot it vas the big man said to his porters when they got too noisy last night over their beer. Now I only know that I've never seen porters like them before; they 'fell in' this morning just as if they vas soldiers. Also, I'd like to know vot vas in those cases they carried on pack mules. Now, all I know is that they vas very heavy.

"Ah, vell, in time, we shall see."

HE TOOK a small penny whistle from his pockets and blew three sharp blasts.

Twelve natives came running in answer to its piercing summons and stood silently before him.

They were very dirty; they were naked save for filthy loin-cloths and their hair was daubed with some pungent-smelling grease.

"The game is over," Isaacs said tersely. "Go and get clean."

They hastened away, chattering gaily.

"Moses!" Isaacs called, and one of them returned.

"Yes, master?"

"Did you obey my commands?"

"Yes, master."

"Did you hear anything that I should hear, or see anything my eyes would have been glad to see?" A man with his back to the speakers would have thought two natives were talking.

"No, master. I sat with the porters last night until the fires burned out and the beer which at first had opened their mouths closed their eyes. But I heard nothing. They spoke only of women and beer as men will."

Isaacs nodded in dismissal.

"Get water and clean clothes ready for me when you have bathed," he said. "Then prepare skoff. The umfundisi eats with me and—" he added with a chuckle as he saw a uniformed horseman riding up the hill along a trail far to the left of that taken by the others, —"the policeman also."

"Yes, master! Shall I cook the rest of the goat?" He smiled.

"No!" Isaacs bellowed. "Kill four chickens and roast them—get cans of soup from the store—get anything. Only, see that you serve a good meal. We are hungry men."

The native grinned and departed, shouting orders to the others as he went.

By this time the man on horseback had ridden into full view of the men on the stoop. They rose to greet him and beamed a welcome.

"Vell, vhy don't you dismount?" Isaacs asked.

"Too much of a hurry, Big 'Un," the other answered. He wore the uniform of a trooper in the British South African Mounted police. He was a big fellow, muscular, and sat his horse easily.

"But you've got to stay. We've got a lot to talk about, ain't we, missioner?"

"Yes," Miles assented gravely. "For one thing we want to know how it is you got our messages so quickly? We only sent for you last night, it's a three-day trip to your post—yet here you are. And yet they say the age of miracles is past!"

"That's right, my boy," Isaacs chimed in. "Just at the very moment when we vant to see your oogly face most, you turn up—an' actually you vasn't due to patrol this section for another monther, yet. Sure! The missioner's right. It's a bloomin' miracle."

Dixon looked slightly bewildered.

"Well, of course," he began, "if you two have gone nutty I suppose it's my duty first to look after you. The Portuguese crowd'll have to wait."

He dismounted and climbed deliberately up the steps.

"Well!" he roared suddenly. "Have you two ducks been fighting? I bet you have; thought you were playing this David and Jonathan stuff too hard. You blamed fools! My, Big Un, the missioner made a mess of your eye—and why are you so dirty and solemn, anyway?"

"Never mind about that, Dixon," Miles said impatiently. "We haven't been fighting, you can be assured of that. But did we understand you to say you were after the Portuguese expedition?"

Dixon nodded.

"Yes. They can't read right. They've got a letter from the Colonial Office giving them safe conduct with instructions to the police to render them all the assistance they may, require—and all that. But they seem to think that that's giving them permission to raise merry ——, pardon, reverend—all up the line.

"Complaints have been coming in from all the kraals they've visited on the way up. And the complaints include everything from wholesale pilfering of natives' stores to violent assault. —— knows what all they've been doing; a few more blighters like them in the country and we'd have a rebellion on our hands. I've been away on patrol so I didn't know what was going on—only got back a few days ago and found a swarm of natives waiting outside my camp full of complaints. Didn't stop to hear them all because rumors had reached headquarters of what these ——, pardon, reverend, were doing, and there was a nice little letter from the C. O. asking what the blankety-blank I was doing and to get after the dagoes right away or he'd put me on the peg. And so I did. Haven't lost much time on the road either. Say, where are they now anyway. Tomasi—seems you were wise, Big 'Un and tipped the old headman to send his women and stuff out of the way—well, he told me they spent the night here."

"They left about an hour ago. They're going to Misongwe to go through the formality of asking Macombe's permission to dig. If he don't give it—they're going to dig anyway."

Dixon looked at Miles quizzically, wondering at the simpering sweetness of the man's voice—usually it was very harsh and nasal. He didn't know that Miles was unconsciously aping the mannerisms of the effeminate D'Andra.

"So that's the way of it, is it?" Dixon said quietly. "But they'll have to go through the formality of asking my permission first—and this, too." He patted his revolver.

MILES and Isaacs looked at each other in relief. They felt that the menace which hovered over the district in which they worked—each in his own peculiar way—for the happiness of the people would soon be lifted. Having a hearty respect for the forces of law and order themselves, they credited other people with the same respect.

At least Miles did. Isaacs perhaps, was not quite so confident in the submission of the man Gonzales to authority and he put his trust more in the forceful personality, the courage and the knowledge that Dixon had of the country rather than in the uniform he wore.

"Well—," Dixon turned to leave—, "if you fellows are all right now, I'll trek on. I want to have a word with 'the man with the whip, as the natives call him, before he uses his *sjambok* on any more of our people."

"No, vait," Isaacs urged. "There ain't no need for such a bloomin' hurry. They don't go near any kraals on the way to Misongwe—and they von't get there till sundown. So you vait an' have skoff with us and talk a bit. You can easily catch up with 'em."

"All right," Dixon agreed. "Might as well. I'm ——, your pardon, reverend, hungry. Call one of your bright hopefuls and tell him to take care of my horse, Big 'Un. But, mind you, you've got to wash and change before I sit down with you. ——! You look like you'd been dragged through the offal heap at Macombe' skraal. And why's the place looking like a pig stye?"

Isaacs grinned.

"I'll go and change now, ——, an' I'll bathe, too. You sit down and have a talk with missioner. He'll tell you all about it."

Three hours later Dixon, looking greatly refreshed, mounted his horse ready to ride after the column of the expedition. He was holding the reins of the missionary's horse, Miles having suddenly decided to return to his mission, and, as they followed the same trail for a matter of six or seven miles, he had asked Dixon to wait for him.

"Hurry up!" Dixon shouted.

"Won't be a minute," Miles answered. He was having a few parting words with Isaacs' servants at the back of the store.

Isaacs, who was seated on the top step of the stoop, his elbows on his knees, his chin resting on the palm of his hands, grinned.

"He's a foony man, Dixon. He always trys to convert my boys vhen he comes here an' then apologises to me for doing it. But he's a nice fellow. He'll be a big man some day."

"If he ever is, it'll be because of you, Big Un. You've done wonders with him."

"Nunno," Isaacs interposed hastily. "He had it in him all the time. He only needed to be shown the vay, that vas all. But he ain't nearly so mealie-mouthed, is he——?"

"No," Dixon agreed. "An', come to think of it, you don't curse as much as you used to do. Getting religion, Big 'Un?"

"Nunno," Isaacs giggled. "I'm losing money. I give him a shilling every time he hears me swear—an' he counts the smallest words, mind you, Dixon. An' he gives me a shilling every time he talks business to me."

"Business?"

"Sure! Professional religion stuff."

The two men laughed quietly, then Isaacs sobered.

"But you von't forget, vill you, Dixon, to look around at the packs of them expedition fellows?"

Dixon nodded.

"I'll keep a sharp lookout, but you're dreaming nightmares, Big 'Un. This here Gonzales, now. I know he's a rotter—he's an ivory poacher and probably a slaver. But the business you're thinking of is an international affair, and what bloomin' chance has a used-to-be country like Portugal against us?"

"Oh, vell. Maybe you're right—maybe you're wrong. Keep your eyes peeled, that's all. And, Dixon, you'll come back this way and tell us all about it, von't you?"

"Of course, Big 'Un. Going to stay round here for a few days."

"Fine! And Dixon ve'll have a elephant hunt while you're here. The big fellows are getting too familiar——"

At that moment Miles appeared, walked briskly over to his horse and mounted.

"Been doing a little missionary work with your boys, Big 'Un," he said. "Hope you don't mind?"

Isaacs waved his hands to signify that that "was no never mind" to him.

"S'long," Dixon said. "I'll be over tomorrow night sure."

"I'll wait skoff for you. S'long, missioner. Don't be so long between visits; my boys'll backslide if you vait too long."

A final waving of hands and the two men spurred their horses and cantered easily down the trail.

For a long time Isaacs did not move, but sat hunched up, gazing fixedly in the direction of Misongwe—as if attempting to project himself into the future and see what play Fate was going to produce at the kraal of the chief—comedy or tragedy?

THREE days passed and Isaacs was without word of Dixon. His native servants and the natives of the kraals were also without information. For once the bush telegraph was silent; the big signal drums at Misongwe did not answer to the querulous tapping queries from the smaller kraals—they were mutes. Still more disturbing to Isaacs was the fact that the two messengers he had sent to bring him word of Dixon had not returned.

Isaacs was badly worried and when, in the late afternoon of the third day, word came to him that the messenger he had sent to Inyati was held up by a flooding river, he resolved to put an end to his idle conjectures by riding over to Misongwe and finding out for himself just what was what.

Once his mind was made up, it did not

take him long to act. Five minutes later—he had changed from his clean white duck suit to garments which exaggerated his physical imperfections—he was riding a big, raw-boned mule toward Misongwe.

He came to the corn patches of the large kraal just about half an hour before sundown, and the kraal itself was in sight just a few minutes later. It was built close against the walls of a precipitous kopje and was practically impregnable from attack except from the front. Two or three hundred yards from the kraal—about midway between it and the edge of the corn patches—was a large tent. It was not in line with the path leading to the kraal, but quite some distance to the right of it.

Isaacs, after reining in a moment, trying to determine his course, headed for the tent. As he got nearer he saw that a hundred, more or less, of the porters were working frantically with pick and shovel. They were, he saw, digging a long trench which curved back slightly at both ends toward the kraal. This trench when finished, Isaacs saw, judging by the markers stuck into the ground, would cover the front of the kraal.

"Never heard of any ancient buildings following that line," Isaacs mused. "Ah, vell— Oy, I vonder vot that's for."

A report broke the silence, a little puff of dirt sprang up just to the right of him.

Looking up he saw a native waving his arm frantically and pointing away from the tent.

Isaacs shrugged his shoulder.

"It seems as if they don't vant to see me," he muttered. "Vell, I'm not so sure I vant to see them—yet."

He changed his course and presently came to the gate in the pole stockade which surrounded the kraal.

It was guarded by two natives—porters of the expedition—armed with modern rifles. But not a native of the kraal was present.

"You can't go in," one of the guards said in the dialect of the district, when he tried to ride past them.

"Why?" he asked quietly.

"It is an order."

"But I have business with the chief Macombe," he expostulated, and again spurred forward.

One of the guards caught hold of his bridle reins and, exerting all his strength, backed the mule. The beast reared, then toppled over as the guard gave it a cunning push. Isaacs only just managed to squirm out of the way of its flying hoofs, then sat up stupidly and watched the mule regain its feet and gallop swiftly away.

The storekeeper rose sadly to his feet and turned away from the gate, intending to encircle the stockade in the hope of finding a weak place where he could scramble through or over.

Then he saw that sentries had been posted at intervals all around the stockade.

Isaacs sighed loudly.

"And why so gloomy, Senhor Storekeeper?"

Isaacs jumped round with a frightened squeal to face the man Gonzales who had come quietly up behind him.

"Oy, how you frightened me. I vant to get in there and your niggers von't let me."

Gonzales laughed.

"It is my orders—they're good soldiers; they obey."

"But vhy, mister. It ain't right. You'll ruin my business. I have to go an' arrange a deal with old Macombe, an'——"

"Is that all you came over for," Gonzales asked sharply.

"Nunno! I also vanted to have a talk with that policeman fellow. He owes me money. He bought some goods from me three days ago and promised he vould return the next day and pay. An' he didn't. So I come over here to see if he vas here. It vas here he said he vas coming."

"He came here," Gonzales said slowly, "but he only stayed an hour or so. Then he rode off——"

"Oy!" Isaacs wrung his hands. "I'll be ruined. These policemen are all alike. They alvays grin and promise to pay tomorrow—only they never do. But vhy do you have men with guns every where, mister?"

"The niggers at the kraal were insolent—they refused to help me dig and some of them have been stealing our stores. So, to punish them, I've forbidden them to leave their kraal for five days."

Isaacs nodded.

"That's the vay to treat 'em, mister. I vish I had the nerve to do things like that. I vouldn't keep a store very long then?"

Gonzales sneered and turned away.

"Say, mister," Isaacs ran after him and clutched at his sleeve with a grimy paw. "My mule, he ran away and I von't be able to get back to the store. Can I stay with you for the night?"

"You can sleep with my niggers—if they'll have you. But I don't think they will."

"That's no way to treat a white man, mister," Isaacs expostulated. "I couldn't sleep vith niggers anyvay. Vell, then sell me a horse or a mule. I can't stay on the veld all night—I'll get sick, an' there's lions. An' you von't let me go in the kraal—please, mister!"

Gonzales brought the butt of his *sjambok* down on Isaacs' fingers.

"No!" he roared. "Now get to your sty—walk—run—get there anyway you please, but don't let me see you around here. Understand?"

He did not wait to hear the storekeeper's mumbled, "Yes, mister," but walked swiftly away toward the tent.

Isaacs, sucking his bruised knuckles, stared at the broad back of the Portuguese and scowled at the man's brutal swagger.

"Oy!" he sighed. "I ain't no better off than vot I vas before I came—save that I know vot before I only thought. But how they think they're going to pull it off—that's vot I can't even imagine. Maybe I'd better start back for the store and mind my own business. I ain't got nothing to do with the British Government, I ain't on their pay sheet. It's none of my business if the Portuguese grabs Macombe's country."

But Isaacs knew that it was decidedly his business to see that the natives of the district should be accorded good treatment; he had been their wise counsellor and friend for too many years to back out now. They had come to lean on him; were ready to pay him a greater homage than they did their chief. He couldn't desert them now—at least not to the Portuguese. The administration of that country's colonies was not the sort of thing he wished to see duplicated here.

"Oh, ——!" he muttered. "Glad the missioner ain't here. I'm goin' to curse a lot tonight. Maybe, if I hurry, I'll catch up with that fool mule. Can't stand here no longer. I'm afraid of that Gonzales. An' me with no revolver! Oy, vot a fool I am."

He started back along the trail at a slow lope, again making a sweeping detour to avoid the camp of the expedition.

He found his mule standing quietly under a kaffir orange tree just beyond the fringe of the first corn patch and, tethering it securely, he sat down to wait for darkness and the distorted shadows that would flicker about the ground when the moon rose.

The sun set; for a little while there was profound darkness. Then the moon rose, it was nearly at the full, and Isaacs left the protecting shelter of the corn and crept toward the tent.

IT TOOK him nearly two hours to cover the four hundred odd yards, but each foot of his progress had to be taken with infinite care. Where possible he followed the shallow ravines which broke the contour of the ground; where that was not feasible he sprawled prone upon the veld, seemed to flow into it, to become a part of it. In some uncanny way he seemed able to constrict his body so that it conformed to the smallest of the lacey shadows which dotted the veld. Whenever he moved—it was forward.

It was masterly work—there were few natives who could have done it so well. Isaacs didn't know whether any night watch was kept at the camp, or where it was posted; actually Gonzales was trusting to the sentries about the kraal. He didn't fear danger from any other source. But even if there had been sentries—alert sentries at that—it is very doubtful if they could have spotted Isaacs.

Peering under the flap of the tent, Isaacs could see Dixon lying on the floor. He was bound hand and foot and gagged. Near him was the fat, porcine figure of the old chief Macombe. The man Gonzales was seated on a cot bed—a bottle of gin in his hand. He was watching D'Andra clumsily attempt to assemble something which glittered evilly in the light of the kerosene lamp.

Every once in a while, when D'Andra would stop and groan wearily as he looked at his broken nails and grease-smeared hands, the *sjambok* would quiver in Gonzales' hand and the cutting lash would lap itself about D'Andra's thin legs. This was followed by shrill threats and entreaties which were answered by sneering laughs.

Isaacs could see no sign of the rotund, baldheaded little professor. But he had seen enough. He had seen soldiers digging a trench in an excellent strategical position, and soldiers on guard at the kraal; he had seen Dixon and the chief, Macombe, both prisoners, and he had seen D'Andra assembling a machine gun.

For a fraction of a second he entertained the wild thought of attempting a rescue right then; second thoughts and better judgment, however, vetoed the plan. He knew that such a move would be suicidal—even if he were armed the chances against success were too heavy. As it was——

He returned to his mule—his course was just as cautious but infinitely swifter—mounted and rode slowly away until he judged himself to be well out of earshot. Then he spurred his mule into a speed it had not thought itself capable of.

On Isaacs rode.

And then——

He must have been completely immersed in his thoughts; the mule must have been so completely surprized out of its normal, obstinate self, by Isaacs' constant spurring, that it forgot all its traditional fears.

At any rate they passed through a herd of elephants—coming so close that the toe of Isaacs' left boot grazed the leg of one of the beasts—on their way to raid the corn patches of Misongwe.

And the marvel of it is, that the great gray ghosts of the bush ignored the mule and its rider with contemptuous indifference.

Isaacs must have seen them, must have got their scent and heard their intestinal rumblings. But he was not consciously aware of them. Yet, in his mental imagery at that moment, Gonzales and D'Andra assumed the shapes of elephants and were trampling the life out of the people of the district—wantonly laying everything to waste.

IT WAS sunrise when Isaacs reached his store. He was so full of the plan which he had evolved during his ride from Misongwe that he was not conscious of any feeling of fatigue. All he required was a shower, a brisk rub down, a change of clothes and then——

His eyes sparkled. His plan must succeed; he did not dare to think of failure.

He had just sat down to a hearty breakfast when Miles rode up to the store and rushed into the skoff hut. He wore a long, black cassock; a large gold cross, hung on a black ribbon about his neck, swung to and fro—agitated by his rapid breathing. It reflected the bright sun rays which streamed through the open doorway.

"Vot is it, missioner?" Isaacs asked calmly, making no comment on the fact that Miles, in striking contrast to his peace "uniform" carried a rifle in his hand and wore a heavy cartridge belt about his waist.

"Matter," Miles cried excitedly. "Why the professor came to the mission yesterday just before sundown. The poor old chap had got lost and the fever caught him unprepared. He told me a lot of things——"

"Such as—that Dixon and the chief, Macombe, had been captured and held as prisoners by Gonzales," Isaacs interrupted dryly. "That their porters are really soldiers—that they've dug a big trench at Misongwe and that they've got maxims? Is that it?"

"Yes," Miles assented wonderingly. "But how do you know all this?"

"I have eyes, missioner. I've got brains. I vent to Misongwe yesterday and saw all them things for myself."

"And they let you? They didn't try to stop you?"

"I didn't go through the formality of asking their permission," Isaacs said with a chuckle.

"But I don't see how you can sit there so calmly, and eat——"

"Vot is your hurry, missioner? By hurrying you vill do no good. You ain't had breakfast yet—no? Then sit down an' eat. A man thinks better when his belly's full. That's better," he continued as Miles seated himself and reluctantly accepted a cup of coffee which one of Isaacs' servants offered him. "Now tell me: Is there anything else you know, which I don't know? Did the professor tell you vot little game Gonzales and D'Andra are playing?"

"He doesn't really know, I think. The little he knows is what he overheard today before he left Misongwe to explore in the hills about the mission. But from what he said, I gather that they've got a concession which Macombe signed years and years ago. And they plan to fortify themselves and then, holding Macombe as hostage for the natives' good behavior, they're going to notify the British authorities that they've annexed the territory on behalf of Portugal. It's a clever plan, and if we don't do something, it may succeed. Once they've finished their fortifications they'll be able to withstand a long siege—long enough, at least, for Portugal to present their case to the Hague Tribunal."

"Yes," Isaacs agreed. "I don't yet see how they're going to carry their plan through—an' that's no matter. The only thing that counts with us is that they're dangerous; they do bad things to our people. But vhy does the professor tell you the plans of his countrymen?"

"He didn't really tell me all this, Big 'Un. He didn't know what he was saying—he was half-delirious with fever. He's afraid of those two men; he's afraid they will kill him—he was horrified by the way Gonzales beats the natives. But—I—I don't think he would have told anything if it had not been for the fever."

"Vell, you can let your conscience rest easy. I knew all that he has told you—except about the concession; an' that doesn't count much, anyvays. Vot we've got to do, missioner, is put Gonzales and D'Andra vhere they can't do no harm. An' it'll be a hard job, missioner. They have two machine guns, perhaps more, an' a hundred an' fifty native soldiers who can shoot—unless the one who fired at me tried to hit me."

"We can do it," Miles said stoutly. "The Lord is on our side." His eyes glowed with fanatical fervor. "He will not give this land, which is His vineyard, into the hand of those despicable creatures."

"How are you going to do it?" Isaacs asked abruptly.

"The sword of the Lord—"Miles began, but Isaacs interrupted him.

"Never mind that, missioner—vot are *you* going to do?"

"Last night I sent a messenger to all the kraals, telling them what was happening at Misongwe and telling the warriors to come to the mission that we might make plans——"

"Good!" Isaacs exclaimed. "How many came?"

"Twelve hundred—young men and old—armed with spears and knobkerries—all ready to strike a blow for the right."

Isaacs smiled sadly at Miles' demonstration of fervor.

"Vell," he asked. "And vot are you going to do now?"

"I'm going to lead them to Misongwe—it will be a crusade. We shall attack the force of Gonzales and we shall win because the sword of the Lord——"

"Vith one machine gun alone they could wipe out your crusaders!" Isaacs commented.

The missionary laughed scornfully.

"You're afraid!" he said. "You're thinking of your precious skin. You're too concerned in thinking of—" He broke off suddenly as Isaacs chuckled. Then, "I'm sorry, Big 'Un! I shouldn't talk that way; I ought to know better—I'm still very much of a fool, I am afraid."

"Sure you are," Isaacs agreed cheerfully. "You just imagine yourself marching at the head of the warriors to Misongwe and expect to vin just by showing yourselves. It vould be nice if it could be like that—but that ain't the vay it'll have to be done. We've got to be cunning—very cunning."

"You mean that we should wait for darkness and make a surprize attack," Miles said slowly. "But we don't dare wait, Big 'Un. Any moment they may take it into their heads to do something dreadful; or the natives at Misongwe may try to rescue their chief and then there'd be frightful bloodshed. I think my way's better than that."

Miles was still lost in the glorious idea of leading his crusaders to victory.

"Maybe," Isaacs admitted. "But, in a vay, you're right. I vas thinking myself of a surprize attack—but not just vith your men."

"You mean that we must wait for reinforcements—you need a bigger army?"

"Yes." Isaacs giggled slightly. "It'll be bigger—much bigger."

"But we can't wait too long," Miles said fearfully. "Not more than two or three days at the most."

"Listen," Isaacs said patiently. "Ve could almost afford to wait until troops came from Inyati, I vould vait, only I'm afraid, as you say, that the natives will try to rescue Macombe by themselves; and I'm afraid the big fellow Dixon vill say something that vill make Gonzales mad—and then there'd be no more Dixon. So ve von't wait. Ve'll start at once. But you army's too big."

"Too big!" Miles echoed incredulously.

"Sure! You'll understand in a little while—only you've got to trust me. Now vhere did you leave this army of yours."

"The warriors are all down at the foot of the hill—"

"You vas a fool to leave them so far avay.

They von't like vaiting down there all alone. They'll begin to think things—they'll begin to think of death; an' that von't be nice. Some of them vill remember that they have vork to do at their kraals—but, no matter. Come on. You come and mutter charms—or prayers, vot does it matter which?—while I'm making the army smaller."

He rose and leaving the store went down the hill to where the warriors summoned so hastily by Miles had congregated, and Miles, nervously fingering his gold cross, followed silently behind him, listening to the plan Isaacs unfolded as he walked.

When they got down to the level ground at the foot of the hill they saw that Isaacs' fears were well justified. Small groups of natives were already returning to their kraals; indecision and doubtful fears was plainly evident on the faces of the others. They had heard a great deal of the power of the "guns with many voices" and they were beginning to doubt the wisdom of the course the missionary had incited them to follow. After all, they knew very little of Miles. He had not lived in the district long enough for his influence to hold when he was not actually with them.

But when they saw Isaacs all fears left them and they shouted his name and crowded about him. The little groups who had left the main body halted at the sound of Isaacs' name, turned, then came running back—pretending that they were new arrivals, hoping that he had not witnessed their desertion. The little storekeeper they knew. He had proved himself, time and time again. If he was to lead what need had they to fear?

And so, those who had been ready to return to their kraals were now in the front ranks of those who crowded about Isaacs and Miles; and of all those who pleaded to be led at once against the white men who had dared to make their chief prisoner, their voices were the loudest.

ISAACS climbed on to a rock and held up his hands for silence.

"I have little to say," his voice boomed out. "You know why the umfundisi asked you to arm yourselves: it is to drive out of this land the white men who have acted like rogue elephants There is no need for me to talk of that. The umfundisi has told you, also, that the men have with them many black dogs with guns—aye, they have, too, the guns of many voices. You know that if we go up against them you will meet death. Not one will escape."

"Au-a!" they cried. "We will be content to die if you lead us."

"Will your deaths help Macombe, fools?" Isaacs asked scathingly.

"Maybe, storekeeper," a young buck shouted. "Maybe one out of all the warriors here will live long enough to reach the heart of the white 'man-with-the-whip' with an assegai."

"Ah! There speaks a warrior," Isaacs shouted. "But that is not my way of doing things.

"Listen! I have made a charm which will bring us victory. Aye. It is a strong charm and it is jealous of its power. It may be that alone it could gain the victory—of that I am not sure. But sure I am that you are too many. Less than half of you—au-a! less than a quarter of you—with them shall victory be gained.

"Now look into your hearts—remembering that the charm I have made is all powerful and hates liars—and those of you who find fear there, let them depart to their kraals; and there shall be no shame. This thing that we do is of the spirits and who shall jeer when the Great Ones work?"

The warriors stirred uneasily, but none spoke. Presently some of them elbowed their way out; some of those on the fringe of the army moved apart. Three hundred warriors in all left the main body, broke up into smaller groups and hastened along the paths leading to their kraals. From one of these a young warrior dashed back. It was the one who had said, "Maybe one of us will live long enough to stick an assegai in the heart of 'the-man-with-the-whip.' "

"I am not afraid of death, storekeeper," he shouted. "It was fear of the charm which you work that took my feet away from you."

"Good!" Isaacs boomed. "Now all of you raise one hand above your heads—you are still too many; the charm tells me to make still further choice."

A forest of arms shot into the air.

"Good. Now each of you look to the hand that is in the air and those among you whose fist is clenched—those men shall go to the right; the others shall go to the left. Is it understood?"

"Aye!" they answered and immediately began milling about, sorting themselves according to his orders.

Soon it was done and two groups of warriors faced Isaacs, waiting expectantly. And those on the right, the men who had clenched their fists, numbered about five hundred. To the others Isaacs said,

"I have no need of you—get to your kraals. Hasten, we waste much time."

They obeyed him silently, swiftly.

"You are still too many," Isaacs said to those who were left. "The charm is strong; the charm is jealous. Follow me."

Climbing down from the rock he led the way to the river.

"Drink," he said, and watched closely. Miles, also, closely scrutinized each warrior as he came to drink.

Soon all had satisfied their thirst—all except the young warrior, and he was about to do so.

"And now," Isaacs cried, "those of you who took the water up in your hands, get together in one place; those of you who put your heads down to the water get to another."

And then the young warrior who had not yet quenched his thirst but stood listening to Isaacs' commands his face lined with thought, stooped down and bringing water up to his mouth in his cupped hands drank, his eyes fixed on Isaacs.

"Why did you drink that way, warrior," Isaacs asked softly.

"It came to me that that is the way the charm would have warriors drink, storekeeper. By drinking so, my eyes are open to see all that goes on about me. Had I put my face down to the water an enemy might have come up behind, unseen and—" he chuckled—"I should not have had need of water again. Also, it came to me, the charm selected those men whose fists were clenched because——"

"That is enough, warrior," Isaacs interrupted sternly, yet his eyes twinkled. "Go and join those who drank as you drank but, remember, the charm also likes those who keep a still tongue."

Then to those who had put their heads down to the water, Isaacs said,

"Get you to your kraals, the charm has no need of you: Go—remembering that there is no shame."

And when they had gone he turned to the men who were left—three hundred of them, full of confidence. Had they not been selected by the charm? Who could stand against them?—and divided them into two companies. In one company, which he placed under the command of Miles, there were one hundred men. The other, two hundred strong, looked to him for orders.

"Now sleep, if you wish," Isaacs ordered. "The time is not yet at hand!"

"You see," Isaacs said softly to Miles. "There is no fear in them. If you vas to give the order they vould march with you to attack —— an' that ain't swearin' neither, missioner."

Miles nodded.

"Yes, they would follow me," he agreed, "if you ordered them to. I've got a lot to learn, Isaacs. Sometimes—" he sighed—"I'm afraid I'll never learn."

"You ain't got nothing to grumble at, missioner. You're learnin' all the time. But you're too old yet to know these people as I know them. They're only kids an' you must be like a kid if you want to understand them. Y' got to grow younger, missioner, that's all. Course, had you stayed with them you might have held 'em just vith that big gold cross of yours—maybe not. No. I think not. Before these people believe in charms, they vant to see vonders worked by that charm. Now they think my charm selected 'em an' they know the charm picked vell. They don't stop to think that I could have picked me men just as vell vithout all that mumbojumbo. Sure, missioner; if I'd have counted 'em out—'eenie, meenie, minee mo'—that 'd have held 'em better than the cross vithout any mystery talk.

"An' now," he yawned and stretched his hands high above his head, "I'm goin' to sleep. I vas trekking all last night. An' you had better sleep too."

"No! I can't sleep, Isaacs. I'm too worried. I still don't see how what you're planning to do will help us."

"Tchat!" Isaacs clicked impatiently. "Never mind about me and vot I'm a-goin' to do. You make sure you know vot you are to do. You see, missioner: It may be that we could pull off vot we vant to do vithout the help of my big army—" he chuckled softly—"on the other hand maybe not, an' we can't afford to take chances. Remember: They've got a disciplined force, an' rifles, an' Maxims—not to mention a good position. You know the lay of the land about Misongwe, don't you?"

Miles nodded.

"Vell! You know that thick patch of bush to the right after you come through the corn patch?"

Again Miles nodded.

"I ought to. I've held service on the rising ground there a lot of times—used the bush as a sort of vestry, put my cassock and surplice on you know."

Isaacs smiled.

"Vell! You goin' to hold another sort of service there tonight. Listen: Gonzales and D'Andra have pitched their tent not far from the bush. All right, then. You'll take your men and hide yourself in that bush. You'll have to plan your trek so as you'll get there after sun set and before the moon rises. And you'll vait there until things begin to happen."

"But if we get so close why can't we attack at once?"

"Because!" Isaacs exclaimed wearily. "Oh, ——, missioner, don't be so foony. They'll have sentries posted, maybe, and they've got guns an' Maxims, an' your cross'll only stop a bullet if it gets in the vay of one. An' even if you vun in the end, first a lot of men vould die. No! You'll vait until I make things happen an' then, when they're all busy lookin' at me, then you can attack—if there's any need to," he added as an afterthought.

Miles frowned doubtfully.

"You'll promise to obey orders, missioner," Isaacs said fiercely, "or I'll make you stay behind."

"Of course I'll obey, Isaacs," Miles said hastily. "But how long will we have to wait? Supposing your plan fails, what then?"

"You'll vait until just before sun rise an' if I ain't come by that time, you an' the cross can do things your own vay. But you von't have to vait that long. Now go away and let me sleep. Call me at noon."

With that Isaacs curled up into a ball and in a few moments was snoring loudly.

But Miles was far from sleep, and he paced nervously up and down until, startled by an indignant grunt, he looked down into the sleep filled, reproachful eyes of one of the natives.

He made a gesture of apology then and sat down on a near-by boulder. The native sighed contentedly, closed his eyes and slept again.

Time passed.

Miles' eyes roved continually from one sleeping form to another; he held grimly on to his gold cross as if seeking to gain confidence and courage from it.

Something moved in the undergrowth back of him. He picked up his rifle and turned quickly just in time to see a bush-pig vanish into the deep bush shadows. He laughed softly at the memories the pig had conjured up, then he occupied himself with examining the mechanism of his rifle.

He sighed, placed his rifle carefully on the ground beside him, and fingered the cross again.

Miles' head wagged, he slid off the rock on to the ground, he edged around a little to get into the shade of the rock, his eyes closed.

Miles slept; one hand closed firmly on the stock of his rifle, the other on the cross which hung from his neck. His face expressed the great contentment which goes with a complete confidence in a plan to be followed.

HE AWAKENED some hours later and smiled into the face of Isaacs who was standing over him.

The natives were standing eagerly about, looking at him with impatience.

"Is it time that we started?" he stammered. "I have been asleep. I didn't mean to."

"Sure you slept," Isaacs chuckled. "An' you must have the conscience of a two-year-old, missioner. You avakened so easy-like. Yes. It's time that ve vent—to eat."

"Eat?" Miles echoed incredulously.

"Sure! These men still have bellies, missioner, an' some of 'em may not eat again after tonight. Come!"

He led the way back to the store where his boys had prepared vast quantities of mealie-meal and boiled chicken for the natives.

"Ve vill eat, too," Isaacs said, and led the missionary into the skoff hut, ignoring his frowns at the gourds of beer with which the natives were washing down their food.

An hour later the two white men left the hut and found that the natives, too, had finished their skoff, and were passing the time in rough horse-play and the telling of jokes which were as primitive as their dress. One group was singing a mission hymn-tune and Miles beamed approval until he caught the sense of the words they were singing to it. And then his blue eyes flashed coldly, his muscles tensed.

"I said they were children!" Isaacs said quietly and Miles relaxed; he grinned sheepishly.

"It is time we go," Isaacs shouted, and at the sound of his booming voice the horseplay ceased, the song ended in a discordant quaver, the point of a joke remained untold. Without further word they divided themselves as Isaacs had divided them at the river—two hundred on one side, a hundred on the other.

"The umfundisi leads you," Isaacs said to the hundred. "Obey him in all things, my children. Is it understood?"

"Truly!" they shouted. "He is your mouthpiece. We hear and we obey."

"You understand vot you're to do, missioner?"

Miles nodded.

"All right. Take 'em along. Make yourselves as invisible as possible—an' don't let 'em sing anything. Good luck!"

The two men clasped hands and then the missionary, firmly gripping his rifle, led his band down the hill.

As soon as they had disappeared around a bend in the trail, Isaacs had his men line up and addressed them in short, pithy sentences, telling them exactly the part they were to play. The softly intoned "Au-a!", the clicks of admiration which punctuated his discourse satisfied him that they fully understood his plan and approved of it.

His face glowed with pleasure, his eyes sparkled behind the strong-lensed glasses he wore. Isaacs had chosen his men well. Many of them were old, experienced hunters, the rest were of the hunting breed, lacking only the experience which comes with age to make them the equal of the others.

To each of the younger ones he gave a can—kerosene can, small wash-basin, large, empty fruit tin—any kind of can which was large enough to make a noise when beaten upon with a stick.

And then, ready now to put his plan into execution, Isaacs led his men down the hillside.

Coming out on to the broad valley below the men divided into parties of ten, an old hunter in charge of each, and vanished noiselessly into the bush.

Isaacs with another ten continued along the trail in single file until, presently, they too left the trail and became lost in the dense bush. But this maneuver was not to seek shelter, or to mask their advance from possible scouts of the Portuguese: Isaacs and his two hundred men were combing the bush, looking for the recruits to their army.

They advanced very slowly, noiselessly, and spread out so that they covered a wide front, yet near enough so that they kept in touch with each other.

ONCE a peculiar cry sounded far to the right of them. Isaacs answered it and it was repeated far to their left. Again the cry sounded and Isaacs' men changed their course slightly, bearing toward the direction from which the cry first came.

On they went, stopped now by a bad piece of thorn scrub, now by a tall patch of flesh-tearing spear grass. Once they halted and conversed in excited whispers about a stout tree, the bark of which had been worn smooth at a height of fifteen feet from the ground. Again an uprooted mimosa tree—its sap was still running—aroused their interest and after they had gravely inspected it and the immense, smoking animal droppings which littered the ground thereabouts, Isaacs gave the signal cry, heard it repeated to the left and the right of him, then cautiously followed the track which was clearly marked in the bush—as clearly as if a huge steam roller had gone before them.

Just before sundown they heard noises ahead of them—the snapping of trees and loud rumblings—the bellowings of an elephant.

Their progress became even slower and infinitely more cautious. Not a step was made before the bush ahead was carefully scanned, and before a forward step received the weight of the body, the ground was tested. They dared not risk, at this time, the cracking of a twig underfoot.

Yet, even so, Isaacs—and few natives excelled his trekking ability—nearly walked into a big bull. Standing motionless under a spreading-branched baobab tree, the big fellow had looked like one of the gray bush shadows. He seemed to be unaware of the presence of humans and as they waited, breathlessly, hoping that the wind would not suddenly change its direction, he filled his trunk with dirt and sprayed it over his back.

It sounded like a mighty wind rushing in to fill some suddenly created vacuum. Then he moved steadily off, his big ears flopping, his head moving majestically up and down. Save for an occasional cracking as he wantonly stripped branches from the trees, and an intermittent voiding of wind, the bull's progress was noiseless. As noiseless as that of the puny mortals who followed dangerously close at his heels.

Soon Isaacs and his men came to the edge of a large clearing which sloped gently to a muddy pool. And there they saw a herd of cows with their calves and young bull elephants wallowing happily in the mud. Other elephants, old bulls all of them though none were as big as the one Isaacs' men had been following, were leaving the bush at various points and converging on the pool. As each one joined the herd, he was greeted by the shrill, effeminate trumpeting of the cows. One young bull ventured to dispute the way to the big bull of the herd and the two massive heads came together with a thunderous impact.

The cows squealed, a baby calf ran and sought protection under its mother's belly, its trunk curling up, seeking at this moment of fear, courage from its mother's milk; the other bulls huddled together and looked sagely on. But the fight was already over; that one impact was enough for the youngster and he turned sheepishly away, broke into a shuffling trot and squealed with fear when the big bull trumpted and feinted to charge him.

The victor rocked back and forth—the others moved uneasily and there was an air of unrest over the whole herd until the big tusker's ears flopped lazily and turning his back to the others got down on his knees and wallowed luxuriously.

Isaacs moved impatiently forward, but stopped as a grizzled native placed a restraining hand on his arm.

"We must wait, master," the old one said. "This is their place and we can not hurry them from it. When the moon rises will be time enough. See! The others wait."

The gray beard and the natives who were with him squatted down on their haunches.

Isaacs looked to the right and the left; he sensed rather than saw that this side of the clearing was fringed by his men, all waiting patiently, all realizing that to go slow is often the best speed, realizing that when elephants want to play nothing short of a stampede will move them. And a stampede was not at this time in keeping with Isaacs' plan.

So he shrugged his shoulders resignedly and squatted down beside the gray beard.

"The spirits are with us, master, the charm works," the old one said, whispering as if he were afraid the big beast would hear and understand him. "Some day—very soon—the madness will come upon the big tusker and then the herd will not rest until he is killed. I thought the time had come when he fought the young one. If it had, all our cunning would have been to no avail."

Time passed, the sun set. The western sky flamed red—then darkness came.

Down by the water the tragedies and comedies of elephant life continued; to the waiting men came gargantuan sounds as if the earth labored; in the far distance a low rumbling noise as of thunder sounded and an elephant trumpted in shrill derision of the lion's hunting note; the distant rumbling faded away; a strong breeze, laden with the pungent odor of elephants, stung the men's nostrils and died down again as quickly as it had risen.

Behind in the bush, a heavy tread, the smashing down of bushes, a frightened, bleating note, alarmed the men. A gigantic black shadow loomed up out of the darkness and rushed by them, nearly treading on Isaacs.

He cursed softly then laughed as the gray beard explained—

"It is a young cow—she was lost. Listen! They are laughing at her."

From the darkness below sounded gurgling, chuckling noises.

The moon rose swiftly making of the landscape an etching in black and white. Shadows moved and mysteriously vanished; the elephants down in the hollow milled about uneasily. In the cold, white light they appeared like fantastic shapes of a nightmare. Their fanning ears looked like wings, their searching tusks like gigantic snakes.

THEY lined up suddenly facing the line of beaters, their right forelegs swinging in an attitude of indecision. Several of the bulls advanced slowly, stopped, a few paces more, stopped. The biggest tusker of them all came on alone; advanced to within twenty feet of where Isaacs squatted then stopped and peered uneasily before him.

"They've got our scent," Isaacs muttered. "We're beat if something doesn't turn 'em."

"Look, master! There goes one who has a plan!"

The gray beard pointed to a tiny figure running swiftly across the open. He passed perilously near to the main body of the herd but the elephants seemed unconscious of his presence. They were too absorbed in the hidden menace before them.

Isaacs watched the man gain the high ground opposite and there busy himself, running about in an apparently aimless, ant-like fashion.

Presently a tiny spark of flame appeared.

The gray beard chuckled, "He lights a fire," he said. "He is very wise. Watch now, master, and listen."

The flame grew larger. A faint shout echoed across the valley. A shout and the banging of wood on tin. It was a sacrilegious noise; the voice of a puny mortal deriding the gods.

The elephants turned about. The man was dancing fantastically about the fire—shouting insults, beating the tin can which hung from his neck.

The bull elephants moved forward, took their position at the head of the herd—went forward again—quicker—quicker—broke into their pace-deceiving shuffle, trumpeted loudly and charged at the fire, at the sound, at the dancing figure.

They flowed over and around the fire then passed on into the bush beyond. The menace had passed, the fire was out, the noise ceased, the dancing figure had disappeared. They forgot the other menace, the scent which had first aroused their suspicions. Ahead were sweet, hunger-satisfying mealie crops. Belly hunger asserted itself.

Isaacs and his thin line of beaters surged triumphantly forward, over the muddy pool, up into the bush beyond.

"That one was a man—his name, his deed, must not be forgotten," Isaacs said.

"It will not be," the gray beard chuckled. "He will never weary of telling the story, but we shall weary of its telling."

"He is dead—it is not well to jest of such a brave one, old man."

"He lives, master. See!"

A man stepped out from behind a large tree in front of them. He had run to it and hidden behind its thick trunk when the elephants had charged. They had poured past him, to the right and to the left, a gray, ponderous flood of death. But not one had turned toward him, not one had seen him.

"I'm a hunter," he boasted.

"When the hunt is over—then talk," the gray beard said curtly

* * *

THEY went on in silence, keeping close to the herd. The elephants were moving leisurely now, yet the men had to run to keep up with them. At times only the noise ahead told them of the herd's proximity; at times they got so close that by stretching out a hand they could have touched the hindmost, yet, because of the thick bush growth which the moon's ray could not pierce, were unable to see them.

Again, where the bush was thin, they saw the beasts moving forward with effortless grace and ease—silent shadows of a night of shadows; and once, after topping a slight rise, they came suddenly face to face with the herd. For a full minute men and mammoths seemed frozen into statues carved from the bush—then the elephants wheeled ponderously and continued their journey.

With the cunning of sheep dogs driving a flock of sheep, silently, not pressing too hard for fear the herd would break back or stampede and lose its cohesion, Isaacs and his men followed; and so clever was their hunting craft that the herd's suspicions were being continually aroused—and allayed—until it was evident that any overt demonstration would turn their food-seeking march into a devastating stampede.

And so, in due course, they came to the mealie patches which were before Misongwe.

"I SHALL make you pay sometime for the way you have treated me, Senhor Gonzales," D'Andra said slowly.

The two men were seated outside their tent. The moon was high, there was an atmosphere of peace about the place. From the long trench to the right of the tent came happy snatches of song and boisterous laughter. It drowned the groans which came from within the tent.

Gonzales, his eyes inflamed, his hands unsteady, gulped down another drink.

"At least," he said contemptuously, "I have done my best to make a man of you. You are not so pretty as you were—no. But soon, this will be ended and you will go back to Lourenco Marques and forget all that I have taught you."

"You have taught me nothing," D'Andra said sullenly. "You have treated me as if I were a nigger. You have made me work with my hands——"

Gonzales laughed.

"Let that pass. You, on your part, have been like a fool. You disobeyed my commands. Twice you nearly ruined our mission by that blatting tongue of yours. And so I had to punish you. I could not *sjambok* you as I do the niggers. You cry too easily! But soon all this will be over. There is no need now for caution. We are in an impregnable position. You will be promoted to a high position and——"

"And I shall not forget to make you pay for the misery you have caused me," D'Andra said wrathfully.

"——! Stop snivelling and drink to success. The trench works are finished—we have enough provisions to last a long siege should the English try to oust us before the diplomats are through with their wordy war. Copies of the concession are on the way to the two governments and a messenger goes tomorrow from Macombe asking our government to assume a protectorate over his country."

He laughed brutally.

"My little arguments which I used to persuade Macombe were excellent, weren't they? A nail torn off is very powerful as a persuader—that is an excellent argument—and one has always twenty such arguments at one's disposal. Presented slowly, the arguments are unanswerable. It is rarely necessary to advance more than five of them. Macombe—" he laughed again—"was obstinate."

D'Andra shivered.

"You are a beast, Gonzales. The way you have treated me——"

"Still whining about yourself, eh? Bah! Another word and I will treat you as I treated Macombe." He drank again. "You have nothing to whine about. I permit you to have all the glory; I allow you to take charge of the concession and——"

"My ——! What's that?" D'Andra leaped to his feet.

Gonzales laughed.

"It's only an elephant trumpeting, fool. They will make good hunting for me. The ivory they carry will pay me well for the trouble of this expedition. That is all the concession I want."

A mass of clouds veiled the moon.

"Tomorrow," he continued, "we will cut down the mealie patches. An army could hide there. Still—" he shrugged his shoulders—"before it got to us it would have to cross that bare land where there is no cover—but which we could cover with a leaden mantel of death."

The clouds passed but others were coming up fast.

The two men could see huge, gray forms in the mealie patch. They moved like the flickering fantasies of a nightmare; the air was filled with strange, gargantuan noises.

"The tuskers are feeding well," Gonzales chuckled. "Maybe I won't have to bother about cutting down the mealies after all."

More clouds drifted across the moon, when they had passed and all was light again, the two could see three—four—five elephants standing before the mealie patch. They were swaying their heads uncertainly, their enormous ears were spread out wide, their trunks curved upward.

"Get me my rifle," Gonzales ordered curtly. "I'm going to give them a warning to steer clear of here."

But before D'Andra could move a terrific din arose—a clamor of shouting voices, the beating of tin cans—the firing of guns.

One of the elephants at the edge of the clearing trumpeted loudly and was answered by the bugling of others.

And then, with surprising suddenness, the five big bulls charged forward, followed by the gray, devastating avalanche of the rest of the herd—the earth shook to their ponderous tread.

"——!" Gonzales roared to the soldiers in the trenches. "Fire—before they are on us."

But his voice was unheard in the confusion.

Here and there a soldier fired into the onrushing horde and then, yelling with fear, threw away his rifle and joined in the headlong flight of his comrades.

"——!" Gonzales roared again. "My rifle, D'Andra." But that man had vanished.

Gonzales turned to enter his tent, intending to get his rifle, then he realized that he had delayed too long, that nothing he could do would stop this stampede and he lurched drunkenly in the direction of the kraal, cursing and blaspheming.

Once he turned—the elephants had reached the trench. It had stopped them; they were milling about it, exploring its depth with their trunks.

He slowed down to a walk, stopped and turned to watch them. He saw one pick up a machine gun and toss it into the air. He saw his tent collapse as a big tusker barged into it and he grinned as he thought of the two bound men he had left in it. Their deaths would make things easier for him. They——

And then with a curse he turned and ran again. The big bull was coming on, screaming with rage, maddened by a piece of canvas which flapped about its ears.

Gonzales ran on, cursing, praying. His feet felt like lead, his heart pounded rapidly—his eyes closed—he rolled in his gait.

The heavy pounding behind him sounded closer and closer.

He glanced over his shoulder in a frenzy of fear.

"——!" he shrieked.

And then a swinging blow knocked him headlong—the weight of death dropped heavily on him.

A report sounded crisply above the clamor. Another shot.

The big bull rose from his knees—the moonlight glinted on its blood-stained tusks—then toppled slowly over.

The clouds closed in. It began to rain.

IT WAS early morning.

The children of the kraal were swarming about the body of the dead bull; the women were mournfully examining their trampled mealie patches; the men were crowding about their chief, acclaiming his decision to ask the British to assume a protectorate over them.

Dixon was superintending the roping together of the soldiers who had been the porters of the expedition. Four of them, led by the young warrior, had rushed to the rescue of Macombe just before the big bull crashed into the tent.

"And I ain't a bit sorry," Isaacs said—he and Miles were seated on the ground, their backs against the pole stockade of the kraal—"I killed the tusker too late to save Gonzales. Sure! It vas a —— of a vay to die—but he deserved it!"

Miles nodded.

"Just the same," Isaacs continued with a chuckle. "He must have been a smart man to have caught Dixon. I vonder how he did it? But ve'll never know. That big fellow is a vonderful liar. But look! Ain't that foony!"

He pointed to a monstrously fat woman who waddled out of the gate in the stockade. Under one brawny arm she carried the wriggling figure of D'Andra. In her other hand she clutched a roll of parchment which was tied with a broad red ribbon.

As she came opposite Isaacs and D'Andra she loosed her hold of D'Andra and he dropped, to the ground then scuttled away, yelling with fright. He was captured by two warriors and escorted to Dixon.

The woman, her face glowering with righteous indignation, turned on Isaacs who was giggling loudly.

"And so this comes back to me," she panted. What with her age, her fatness and her exertions she was almost breathless. She waved the parchment feebly. "Macombe the chief gave it to the man who was my husband, Umglubu the Pig, we called him, and he gave it to me. Au-a! that was before you came here, storekeeper. But, just a little while ago, my husband left me, in the quiet of the night he went and he took this from me while I slept. Many times before he had tried to take it, but always I slept on my right side and he couldn't. But that night—" She sighed. "But now it is mine. That child of a man came running into my hut last night, squealing with fear. This was in his hand—so I protected him." She stuck it in the slot in her left ear and waddled pompously away.

The two white men looked at each other and grinned.

"The British ought to give you anything you ask for for this night's work, Big 'Un."

"——!" Isaacs said heatedly. "I didn't do it for them. I vas thinking of Macombe and his people." He chuckled. "Vell, ve did it, didn't ve, missioner? Ve made 'em run."

"Yes," Miles said solemnly. "We made them run. With the sword of the Lord——"

"Oy," Isaacs murmured—he was looking at the retreating figure of the fat woman; the red ribbon on the parchment dangled coquettishly down to her shoulders—"and of Gideon!"

The CAMP-FIRE

A free-to-all meeting place for readers, writers and adventurers

Our Camp-Fire came into being May 5, 1912, with our June issue, and since then its fire has never died down. Many have gathered about it and they are of all classes and degrees, high and low, rich and poor, adventurers and stay-at-homes, and from all parts of the earth. Some whose voices we used to know have taken the Long Trail and are heard no more, but they are still memories among us, and new voices are heard, and welcomed.

We are drawn together by a common liking for the strong, clean things of out-of-doors, for word from the earth's far places, for man in action instead of caged by circumstance. The *spirit* of adventure lives in all men; the rest is chance.

But something besides a common interest holds us together. Somehow a real comradeship has grown up among us. Men can not thus meet and talk together without growing into friendlier relations; many a time does one of us come to the rest for facts and guidance; many a close personal friendship has our Camp-Fire built up between two men who had never met; often has it proved an open sesame between strangers in a far land.

Perhaps our Camp-Fire is even a little more. Perhaps it is a bit of leaven working gently among those of different station toward the fuller and more human understanding and sympathy that will some day bring to man the real democracy and brotherhood he seeks. Few indeed are the agencies that bring together on a friendly footing so many and such great extremes as here. And we are numbered by the hundred thousand now.

If you are come to our Camp-Fire for the first time and find you like the things we like, join us and find yourself very welcome. There is no obligation except ordinary manliness, no forms or ceremonies, no dues, no officers, no anything except men and women gathered for interest and friendliness. Your desire to join makes you a member.

TESTIMONY asked for by E. O. Foster of our writers' brigade concerning the ant-heap and other tortures said to be practised by natives of the Philippines. Will any with definite, first-hand facts on the subject either tell us about it for Camp-Fire in general or write Mr. Foster in our care?

San Francisco.

I wish you would ask Camp-Fire what they know about the ant-heap and other forms of torture practised by the "Little Brown Brothers" in the Philippines. I am of the opinion that some of the old-timers who lived over there in the days of the Empire would say a mouthful. Personally I have never seen a man who had escaped from an ant torture, nor have I ever seen the bones of a man picked clean by the tiny pests, but, I have heard the rumor ever since I first set forth in the First Expedition to the Philippines.—E. O. FOSTER.

THIS comrade's letter has been sent on to Fred Halsey, and it is to be hoped they have "met up" by this time. Incidentally, no one need ask whether he may join our Camp-Fire. If he wants to come in he's probably our sort, and that's all that's necessary for joining our circle.

Marietta, Ohio.

When I was a kid and wanted to come to a camp-fire that some of the gang had built, it was compulsory to bring your "puddins" with you. (Puddins being a stick of firewood to help keep the fire going.) Now I ask you, may I come into your Camp-Fire? I have my puddins.

WAS at Muscle Shoals a few days ago and it was raining to beat a "pat straight." I brought a copy of *Adventure* in order to while away the time and learned that I was not in existence. At least Fred Halsey said "The MacBane is dead."

I want to thank Mr. Halsey for the many nice things he said about my kinfolks. Yes, they were a peace loving family, that is the truth, for my dad told me they all loved a peaceful quiet life. His father, my grandfather, was a stump speaker, a Whig, when he was not buying cattle. It must have been that some persons did not like grandad's oratory, for dad at the age of nine years had to swim the Ohio River, taking with him two revolvers and a knife. His mother had sent him to meet his dad, who was then on a cattle buying trip. Dad said, "The homecoming was very peaceful. Yes, there were quite a few neighbors to meet them, but two guns and a knife strapped on six-foot John MacBane surely were symbolic of peace and there is no doubt in my mind but that the neighbors read those peaceful signs correctly." I promise Mr. Halsey the world's peace will not be disturbed by "the MacBane."

If the Halsey and MacBane trails ever cross, I sure would like to shake hands with the gentleman and guarantee to prove to his entire satisfaction that "The MacBane is *not* dead."—ROBERT MACBANE.

* * *

SOMETHING about snakes chasing people. I can testify only that in various copperhead districts that particular snake bears the reputation of attacking, sometimes without any provocation. An eastern Ohio doctor, whose word is gold, told me a man he had treated for the bite had been bitten from behind while sitting quietly on a log. Of course, the man may have lied, but what motive would he have?

In the case of this comrade, an old lady, I think we are warranted in printing only her initials.

Corpus Christi, Texas.

I see in the copy for November 30, 1924, that somebody is doubting Mr. Payne's article in regard to snakes chasing folks. Now I am not claiming to be an expert on reptiles, but I am going to tell you what I saw in Piney Woods of Florida.

I BEGAN my experience as wife and housekeeper in 1867 and lived at Saw Mill, of which my husband was superintendent. I was the only white woman there. One day, sitting reading in my room, I noticed a rustling among some papers in the big fireplace. Looking up, I beheld an enormous snake with his head raised fully two feet above the floor, gazing me in the face, eye to eye, as it were. Snakes being a horror to me, naturally I went away. Rushing to the porch and springing on a rail, I called for help. Two colored women rushed to my aid in time to see my visitor disappearing through a small hole in the floor. The girls poked at him and he crawled to a brush-heap near-by. They attempted to poke him from there. He came and, with about two feet of him in air, charged 'em. With haste they fled to the gallery while snake went under the house.

This was repeated twice. Finally, on third run, one of the women caught Mr. Snake on the end of her pole and, ramming him against the house, the girls dispatched him. During all this time I held my place on the rail of gallery (clinging to post) and saw the snake drive the women to the house when he had the whole State of Florida to retreat to.

AGAIN a few years later in far away Texas I had a couple of farm boy friends, aged 12 and 14. Sunday was a slow day on the farm and every good fair Sunday afternoon the boys went out over the rail fence into the brush and got up a game with a big black runner. I did not see this snake, but I did see the boys start the game by casting stones into a thick clump of brush and then fly to the top of fence, sometimes running in line with fence for some distance and, when snake went back, repeating stunt. Asked why not kill the brute, they said that they played regularly with it. Lots of fun.

Now all this I saw with good eyes and my people who know me best believe that I tell the truth, as I believe does Mr. Payne. Can't speak for whole American continent, only Texas and Florida, so that is that. The Florida snake was also a black snake.

If you care for this statement, publish it with initials only. I am a very old woman of the old south and interested in the old-time stories as given by you.—MRS. M. A. S.

* * *

SOMETHING from Warren Elliot Carleton in connection with his swordfishing story in this issue. Mr. Carleton knows from experience the hazards of trawling off Georges Banks.

This matter of getting between a liner and a trawler in a fog is a hair-raising experience. I shall never forget those two whistles sounding from opposite directions—the *Hazel M. Jackson* running between them with engine wide open, Captain Bob Jackson at the wheel. We couldn't see a thing through the fog; all we knew of the movements of those steamships was that their whistles sounded closer and closer, until at last the liner went tearing by astern, a gray shadow in the fog. Broad daylight, too—but in the fog it might just as well have been night. It's bad enough for a fisherman to dodge one deep-sea menace, but two at once! And that trawler wasn't much smaller than the liner at that.

The most vivid recollection I brought back from the Banks is that of the utter abandon with which some skippers of steamers tear through the fog. Let me state definitely—and most skippers of the swordfishing fleet will back me up in this—that there are sea captains who show an utter disregard for fishermen. Not all of them, but enough to make fishing uncomfortably hazardous. They positively do not sound their fog whistles at half-minute intervals, nor do they travel at half speed, as the law specifies.

The fishermen do not ask more. All they demand is regular whistling of fog warnings at half-minute intervals. Then they can judge the course of the liner and sheer out of its path. The new England fishermen play too important a rôle in the nation's commerce to be treated so shabbily. They are hard-working, fearless, dependable. They play the same rôle on the ocean that the cowboys play in the West, as Theodore Roosevelt once stated. In war or peace they are never found slacking. The Germans did not minimize their commercial importance, for a submarine raided the Georges fleet, sending to the bottom Captain Bob Jackson's old schooner *Progress* and several others.

It's surprising how few people know that swordfish are caught because they are edible. Not New Englanders, however. I think swordfish was the first fish I ever ate—and from June to September I still eat it whenever I can get it. To my mind it is the "tastiest mess" that old Father Neptune yields to folks ashore. Not a bone in it except the backbone, and the flavor is somewhat like that of chicken. The sword has no commercial value, and is usually thrown overboard as soon as it is amputated from the expiring fish.—Warren Elliot Carleton.

* * *

YOU who are already aroused over the ever increasing measures for suppression of free speech, and you, too, who with good or evil intent are under various pretexts giving your efforts in aid of such suppression, read the following from the *Literary Digest* of August 19, 1922, already once printed by us. And summoning all pretexts, expediences and evasions, answer it if you can.

A Document on "Liberty"—"A model of kindly and devasting criticism" is what the New York *World* calls an editorial in the Emporia *Gazette*. It is perhaps the last word of Mr. William Allen White to his friend, Governor Allen, over the recent controversy that brought Mr. White under orders from the Industrial Court of Kansas. The *World* would give it "a place among historic public documents," and as such, without concerning ourselves further with the questions that brought it forth, we give it to our readers:

To an Anxious Friend:

"You tell me that law is above freedom of utterance. And I reply that you can have no wise laws nor free enforcement of wise laws unless there is free expression of the wisdom of the people—and, alas, their folly with it. But if there is freedom, folly will die of its own poison. That is the history of the race. It is the proof of man's kinship with God. You say freedom of utterance is not for time of stress, and I reply with the sad truth that only in time of stress is freedom of utterance in danger. No one questions it in calm days, because it is not needed. And the reverse is true also; only when free utterance is suppressed is it needed, and when it is needed, it is most vital to justice. Peace is good. But if you are interested in peace through force and without free discussion, that is to say, free utterance decently and in order—your interest in justice is slight. And peace without justice is tyranny, no matter how you may sugar-coat it with expediency. This State today is in more danger from suppression than from violence, because in the end, suppression leads to violence. Violence, indeed, is the child of suppression. Whoever pleads for justice helps to keep the peace; and whoever tramples upon the plea for justice, temperately made in the name of peace, only outrages peace and kills something fine in the heart of man which God put there when we got our manhood. When that is killed, brute meets brute on each side of the line.

"So, dear friend, put fear out of your heart. This nation will survive, this State will survvie, this State will prosper, the orderly business of life will go forward if only men can speak in whatever way given them to utter what their hearts hold—by voice, by posted card, by letter or by press. Reason never has failed men. Only force and repression have made the wrecks in the world."

* * *

THIS woman comrade is, I think, assured of a warm welcome at our Camp-Fire. There are so many of us in whom "the spirit to go" is strong, and so many of us who are shackled by one thing or another.

Harrisburg, Pennsylvania.

I am a woman, but an adventurer, also—only, alas, nowadays all my adventuring must be of the mind and spirit, for age and infirmities of the flesh have put their shackles about my feet and chained me to one spot. But, oh, how I love *adventurers* and how I do enjoy the tales and discussions at Camp-Fire, for many a camp-fire have I sat by and listened to tales of hither and yon—and added a few myself.

Lately Puget Sound has been calling, and when I read

"No more I'll go a'roving and pack my blankets round—
I'll build myself a cabin on the banks of Puget Sound,"

my spirit wept, for that was just what we were going to do out there when the storm king took my husband's boat into his grasp and hungry waves carried him out to sea. And so here I am back in the tame lands. And I want to come and sit around the Camp-Fire and "listen in."

I am a stranger in a strange land—none of my kind here. All the women talk of is bridge, movies, scandals—and I *sit* an outsider. Perhaps the fact that (according to officials at Arrow, the end of the Moffat Railroad over the Rockies) I am the only woman who went over the Divide on horseback on the ties of the Moffat Road 23 miles may let me in around the Camp-Fire, to enter that fellowship of the Great Outdoors.—Mrs. L. H. Wistrand.

* * *

FROM Mr. H. L. Henderson came a query as to why Hugh Pendexter gave the name "Hobson's Choice" to a camp in one of his stories and whether that was the origin of the familiar expression. Here is a copy of Mr. Pendexter's reply:

Norway, Maine.

The camp is so designated in Wayne's Orderly book, and was so called because the May "fresh" compelled the army to land where it did.

ACCORDING to the *Spectator*, No. 509, this saying, meaning "this or none," dates back to Tobias Hobson, carrier and innkeeper at Cambridge, England. Says the *Spectator* in part, "He kept a

> stable of forty good cattle, always ready and fit for traveling; but when a man came for a horse he was led into the stable, where there was great choice, but was obliged to take the horse which stood nearest the stable door; so that every customer was alike well served, according to his chance, and every horse ridden with the same justice."
>
> In 1660 Milton wrote two humorous poems, or epitaphs, on the old carrier's death.
>
> In the *Times* the editor asks on one occasion: "Why is the greatest of free communities reduced to Hobson's choice?"
>
> Possibly Hobson was impelled to make this rule as the greater number of his patrons were university students and inclined to wild riding. In any event his stable rule has perpetuated his name along with his rule through nearly three centuries, and "Hobson's Choice" was a bit of familiar vernacular in the time of Wayne's campaign.—HUGH PENDEXTER.

* * *

AS TO the birthplace of Buffalo Bill. Comrade Guest tells us Scott County, Iowa, is the spot. As he requested, Mr. Guest has been put into touch with Mr. Howard. Another example of the helpfulness and friendly spirit of our Camp-Fire.

> Davenport, Iowa.
>
> In the January 20th issue there were a few lines by Mr. Arthur B. Howard on the famous scout, Buffalo Bill, otherwise known as Wm. S. Cody. One thing I would like to straighten out and correct, as Mr. Howard has his wires mixed on where Buffalo Bill was born. He states Cody was born near Leavenworth, Kansas, but Scott County, Iowa, has always been known as the birthplace of him.
>
> Would like Mr. Howard's address, as I could give him additional data on Cody.—CHARLES GUEST.

* * *

REPEATEDLY at Camp-Fire I've said that undoubtedly the Bolshevics are giving their full support to the anti-weapon craze now sweeping this country. Their method is to gain control of a country by force. It makes it easier to gain control of a country by force—and to keep control of it—if you can disarm its people first.

Quite possibly that seems only "alarmist stuff." But remember that even in the story the wolf did come. And don't forget that nobody has as yet been able to find out who is supplying the money and organized central effort back of this anti-weapon campaign.

Read this from the New York *Herald-Tribune* of March 16:

> Revolution was portrayed with sensational reality yesterday in the course of a Communist pageant given in Madison Square Garden before 10,000 members and friends of the Workers' Party of America. The occasion was a celebration of the French Commune of 1871.
>
> Meanwhile the pageant's interpreter, a speaker wearing a red sash and standing on an eminence to the left of the stage, cried out the mistakes of the Communists in allowing arms to remain in the hands of the bourgeoisie.
>
> This error, he pointed out, resulted in the failure of the French Commune, and the Russian Communists, in 1917, took care not to repeat it, he said.

Note first that there were in one city at a single meeting 10,000 Reds vociferously present. There must be quite a few of them in the whole country!

And the propaganda at that meeting seems to have centered pretty definitely on the idea that the body of the people must be disarmed and kept disarmed if the Red cause is to succeed permanently.

Yet it isn't possible—probable—that it is the Reds who are chiefly back of the anti-weapon campaign?

* * *

TWO of you have sent me a booklet on the Sergeant William Cunningham case. You will remember that Camp-Fire has already heard the charges that Cunningham was railroaded into Leavenworth because he was uncovering extensive graft among commissioned officers in 1919. The facts have not yet been clearly established and that in itself is a disgrace and an injustice. The War Department, however much it strives to ignore it, is nevertheless responsible to the people and dependent upon their good will. And the Administration, however many and great the scandals it has triumphantly survived, does not command any too great an allowance of respect for the loudly advertised whiteness of its moral garments.

The pamphlet closes with the following:

> "Editor of The New York *Bulletin:*—Determined to bring about the liberation of Sergt. William Cunningham, members of the Kings County Council, Veterans of Foreign Wars, representing every post of that order in Brooklyn, unanimously decided to thoroughly investigate the charges and fight for a review of the case which resulted in the confinement of this veteran to military prisons.
>
> Efforts to have an exposure of the "grafter's plot" made known through the medium of the public press were fruitless. City editors, although realizing the news value of the story, dared not "run" an article of this kind which would jeopardize their positions. Committees of the V. F. W., endeavoring to have stories concerning this case printed, were told that a "hands-off" policy was being pursued by the papers requested to feature the articles.

The *Bulletin*, however, had evidenced its fearlessness by sponsoring the cause of this worthy American.

The post of which the writer has the honor of being commander, contributes a stipulated sum weekly in order that the committee may proceed with its duties unhampered by financial need. Fifty other posts throughout Brooklyn also contribute to this fund.

It is the belief of the Raymond A. McIver Post that the Kings County Council, V.F.W., is entitled to the full credit of sponsoring the fight for the vindication and liberation of Cunningham."—GEORGE REANEY, Commander Raymond A. McIver Post, V. F. W., Brooklyn.

At this writing the latest development is that an attempt was made to have Cunningham adjudged insane. But he was, instead, adjudged sane. By a jury. District of Columbia Supreme Court.

Some one may really have considered him insane. On the other hand, an attempt to have him adjudged insane is just the move that would be expected from people who could thus protect themselves from charges they did not care to face from a sane man even if that man had been successfully kept in prison half a dozen years after daring to bring those charges in the first place.

Cunningham may be guilty, and they innocent, but he is not insane. And, whichever of them is guilty, the War Department and the Administration are guilty for not having the main issue cleared up after six years. By a public trial, a thorough examination into all the facts, and an honest hearing. Since a civil court was appealed to in the effort to prove insanity, why not appeal to a civil court in an effort to determine guilt or innocence? A court-martial does not bear the reputation of being a very reliable means of determining guilt. As a lawyer or a judge the military man is likely to be a good soldier. The "welfare of the service" is often a worthy cause, but sometimes it is sadly at variance with justice which is supposed to be blind to all but the facts on which it passes. Discipline is necessary to military effectiveness, but unfortunately it sometimes produces autocrats who are accustomed to settling matters by their own yes or no without too thorough an examination. Loyalty to one's caste and salt has its admirable aspects, but sometimes its personal appeal is irreconcilable with loyalty to abstract justice. At a court-martial a counsel is assigned to the prisoner for his defense, but he is likely to be a junior officer with the unpleasant task of opposing his own superiors for the sake of one of his own inferiors. Nor are court-martials, being human as well as military, free from the charge of having been governed by undue influences.

Decidedly it is up to the War Department and the Administration in general to vindicate the particular court-martial that declared Cunningham guilty. "For the good of the service," if for no other reason. There are extant too many affidavits casting some doubt as to the correctness of its findings to allow the people to accept those findings unquestioningly. While if all the charges made against Cunningham's accusers, condemners and others are true, there is a surpassing rottenness in our military establishment. If these charges are false, they are so injurious that one would think their victims would insist on public vindication.

Pointing to Cunningham's innocence is the War Department's steadfast refusal under several years' bombardment to give his case any more than a star-chamber rehearing. Particularly when followed by a futile attempt to prove him insane. And if it is true that the War Department or some other part of the Administration has been exercising pressure on the press not to give the case publicity, it is a natural inference for many Americans that the powers that be are making a desperate effort to hide something they are afraid to have seen.

Of course Cunningham may be a villain and all the apparent dodging and covering up merely a sane, just and warranted course, but it's high time this were proved to be the case.—A. S. H.

* * *

OUR Camp-Fire Stations are spreading steadily over the map. Help make them grow. Any qualified person can start a Station.

A STATION may be in any shop, home or other reputable place. The only requirements are that a Station shall display the regular Station sign, provide a box or drawer for mail to be called for and preserve the register book.

No responsibility for mail is assumed by anybody; the Station merely uses ordinary care. Entries in register to be confined to name or serial number, route, destination, permanent address and such other brief notes or remarks as desired; each Station can impose its own limit on space to be used. Registers become permanent property of Station; signs remain property of this magazine, so that if there is due cause of complaint from members a Station can be discontinued by withdrawing sign.

A Station bulletin-board is strongly to be recommended as almost necessary. On it travelers can leave tips as to conditions of trails, etc., resident members can post their names and addresses, such hospitality as they care to offer, calls for any travelers who are familiar with countries these residents once knew, calls for particular men if they happen that way, etc., notices or tips about local facilities and conditions. Letters to resident members can be posted on this bulletin board.

Any one who wishes is a member of Camp-Fire and therefore entitled to the above Station privileges subject to the Keeper's discretion. Those offering hospitality of any kind do so on their own responsibility and at their own risk and can therefore make any discriminations they see fit. Traveling members will naturally be expected to remember that they are merely guests and act accordingly.

Keepers answer letters only if they wish. For local information write "Ask Adventure."

A Station may offer only the required register and mail facilities or enlarge its scope to any degree it pleases. Its possibilities as headquarters for a local club of resident Camp-Fire members are excellent.

The only connection between a Station and this magazine is that stated above, and a Keeper is in no other way responsible to this magazine nor representative of it.

Arizona—200—Clifton. C. Hooker.
209—Quartzite. Buck Conner, Box 4.
285—Yuma. W. P. Kline, 4th Ave. & 8th St.
Arkansas—161—Hot Springs. Tom Manning, Jr., 322 Morrison Ave.
California—28—Lost Hills. Mr. and Mrs. M. A. Monson, Cottage Inn.
60—San Bernardino. Charles A. Rouse, Hotel St. Augustine.
73—Galt. E. M. Cook, Box 256.
74—Eagle Rock. John R. Finney, 109 Eddy Ave.
89—Chico. K. W. Mason, 1428 Park Ave.
108—Helendale. G. R. Wells, P. O. Box 17.
113—Vallejo. Edith G. Engesser, Golden Triangle Rabbitry, Highway Homes.
114—Mill Valley. L. F. Guedet, Restawhyle Knoll.
115—Los Gatos. G. H. Johnson.
116—Sebastopol. Mrs. Lucy E. Hicks, 420 S. Main St.
126—Covelo. Whit H. Ham, Box 388.
141—Santa Cruz. A. W. Wyatt, Capitola Road and Jose Ave.
149—San Francisco. A. H. Hutchinson, Veteran Press, 1264 Valencia St.
186—Santa Ysabel. William Strover, Santa Ysabel Inn.
210—Berkeley. Dr. Louis C. Mullikin, 305 Acheson Bldg.
211—Pomona. Fred G. Sunley, 480 E. Alverado St.
212—Del Monte. Alex H. Sokoloff, 3rd Signal Co. R. O. T. C.
231—San Francisco. Earl V. Swift, 24-A Brady St.
251—Williams. Joe Lanouette, Opera Pool Hall.
252—Fresno. Mrs. Harriet Church, Echo Gardens, 712 Echo Ave.
257—San Francisco. K. F. Richards, 1807 Post St.
266—Santa Barbara. E. Chester Roberts, 714 State St.
273—Los Angeles. Henry M. Harrod, 6615 So. Main St.
286—Sacramento. Carl W. La Force, 2329 Eye St.
287—Stockton. Ivan J. Dill, 520 E. Washington St.
Colorado—105—Grand Junction, Bart Lynch, 236 Main St.
267—Sugar Loaf. Frank Earnest.
279—Denver. DeForrest Hall, 2531 Bryant St. E.
Connecticut—142—Meriden. Homer H. Brown, 1 Colony Place.
Delaware—232—Delmar. J. A. Aniba, Stone House Hotel.
D. C.—167—Washington. Walter A. Sheil, 503 Sixth St. N. E.
Florida—87—Miami. A. C. Smith, 49 N. E. First St.
117—Miami. Miami Canoe Club, 115 S. W. South River Drive.
128—Titusville. Max von Koppelow, Box 1014.
138—St. Petersburg. Miss Maude V. Hughson, 2402 First Ave. So.
139—St. Petersburg. Capt. Lee Whetstone, Hotel Poinsettia.
143—St. Petersburg. J. G. Barnhill, 10 Third St. N.
158—Crescent City. E. N. Clark, care *Call*.
188—Johnson. Clifford Martin.
258—Jacksonville. T. J. Eppes, The Hobby Shop.
262—Wildwood. E. M. Dilly, L. B. 114.
285—Tampa. R. Stuart Murray, Mezzanine Floor, Hillsboro Hotel.
288—Orlando. O. D. Young, 112 Court St.
Georgia—98—Hinesville. R. N. Martin, *The Liberty County Herald*.
289—Monticello. O. E. Wells.
Idaho—110—Pocatello. C. W. Craig, 223 S. Second Ave.
Illinois—66—Mt. Carmel. W. C. Carter, 1122 Chestnut St.
67—Plainfield. J. P. Glass, The Linshield Co.
189—Chicago. Herman A. Schell, 8708 Vincennes Ave.
213—Chicago. Pietro Ferraro, 1007 S. Peoria St.
237—Chicago. Wm. Churchill, 6541 S. State St.
253—Chicago. G. C. Huebner, 2608 Magnolia Ave.
290—Gibson City. J. D. Ashley, 117 Sangamon Ave.
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180—Warsaw. Homer Lewis.
287—Vincennes. John C. Maloney, 1004 N. Seventh St.
Iowa—238—Atlantic. George Woodbury, 5 E. Third St.
Kansas—228—Leavenworth. Ben H. Lukenbill, 315 Shawnee St.
Kentucky—144—Corbin. Keith Mauney.
190—Louisville. H. S. Summers, 421 W. Jefferson St.
Louisiana—140—New Orleans. J. D. Montgomery, Navy Recruiting Office.
228—St. Rose. C. M. Elfer.
Maine—19—Bangor. Dr. G. E. Hathorne, 70 Main St.
59—Augusta. Robie M. Liscomb, 73½ Bridge St.
111—Lewiston. Howard N. Lary, 714 Main Street.
243—Winthrop. O. A. Abbot.
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82—Baltimore. Joseph Patti, Jr., 4014 E. Lombard St.
151—Williamsport. L. J. Schaefer, Frederick St.
Massachusetts—56—Watertown Arsenal. E. Worth Benson, Station Hospital.
274—Everett. Aubrey S. McLellan, 4 Marion Place.
Michigan—69—Grand Rapids. Dr. A. B. Muir, 1121 Turner Ave., N. W.
79—Lansing. Geo. H. Allen, *Lansing Industrial News*, 109½ N. Washington Ave.
106—Gaylord. Sidney M. Cook.
131—North Muskegon. James Fort Forsyth, Forsyth Publisher's Service, Phone 5891.
137—Flint. O'Leary & Livingston, 309 So. Saginaw St.
192—Pickford. Dr. J. A. Cameron, The Grand Theater.
227—Adrian. S. N. Cook, 221 Clinton St.
Minnesota—112—St. Paul. St. Paul *Daily News*, 92 E. Fourth St.
145—St. Cloud. F. T. Tracy, 426 Eighth Ave. N.
Mississippi—88—Tunica. C. S. Swann, Tunica Plumbing & Electric Shop.
99—Picayune. D. E. Jonson.
268—Pascagoula. C. E. Walter, 239 Orange St.
Missouri—51—St. Louis. W. R. Hoyt, 7921 Van Buren St., phone Riverside 250.
94—St. Louis. C. Carter Lee, M. D., 3819 Olive St.
127—Salem. Emmet C. Higgins, 100 N. Tenth St.
289—Nevada. T. S. Hope, 705 N. Clay St.
Montana—240—Fort Missoula. Company C, 4th Infantry.
254—Hamilton. Mrs. Lucy Hyde, 64 N. Second St.
288—Anaconda. R. T. Newman.
Nebraska—95—Omaha. L. W. Stewart, 119 No. 16th St.
214—Tecumseh. Dr. C. F. Roh.
New Mexico—96—Silver City. Edward S. Jackson, Box 435.
203—Elephant Butte via Engle. Henry Stein.
229—Santa Fé. N. Howard Thorp, 103 Palace Ave.
290—Sante Fé. Ralph E. Pierson.
New Jersey—91—Tenafly. Ed Stiles, P. O. Box 254.
146—Paterson. Charles S. Gall, 378 Dakota St.
164—Chatham. Roy S. Tinney.
244—East Orange. Alfred C. Swenson, 77 Lawton St.
245—Corbin City. Lee Roberts.
260—Camden. Benj. P. Thomas, 2791 Constitution Rd.
269—South Orange. Eugene Connett, 170 Turrel Ave.
275—Camden. Captain Herbert George Sparrow, Ship No. 1269 Naval Post, Veterans of Foreign Wars, Armory of Second Battalion, Naval Militia of New Jersey, Temple Theater Building, 415 Market St.
New York—23—Jamestown. W. E. Jones, 906 Jefferson St.
34—New York City. St. Mary's Men's Club, 142 Alexander Ave., Bronx, N. Y. C.
147—Youngsville. Harry Malowitz, Youngsville House.
165—Saratoga. Wm. Marshall, Office No. 9, Chamber of Commerce Arcade.
177—Brooklyn. George Iverson, 306 Macon St.
185—Brooklyn. J. M. Canavan, 69 Bond St.
193—Niagara Falls. Roy Tompkins, 1155 Garret Ave.
194—Hadley. Mrs Chas. H. Black.
205—Newburgh. Jacques Teller, 5 Golden St.
215—Yonkers. George's Sport Shop, 45 Main St.
226—Red Hook. P. W. E. Hart, The Silver Birch Shop, Albany Post Road, Dutchess Co.
230—New York City. Fred G. Taylor, 424 Broadway, Dobbs Ferry.
233—Albany. R. N. Bradley, 84 Livingston Ave.
239—Valley Stream, Long Island. Arthur Borchmann, Centarlane.
298—Walton. S. K. Sherman.
North Carolina—92—Biltmore. C. Marshall Gravatt, Felstone Co
133—Pine Bluff. N. Steve Hutchings.
159—Waynesville. Harry M. Hall, 720 Walnut St.
255—Tryon. Howard Shannon.

North Dakota—206—Fairmount. Frank Kitchener, Richland Hotel.
Ohio—52—Ulrichsville. Anthony Sciarra, 329 W. Fourth St.
58—Cleveland. J. F. Thompson, Community Pharmacy, 9505 Denison Ave.
63—Ulrichsville. Chas. F. Burroway, 312 Water St.
75—Columbus. Chas. W. Jenkins, 54 S. Burgess Ave.
113—Buena Vista. Geo. T. Watters.
166—Toledo. Frank P. Carey, 3267 Maplewood Ave., or wherever his Ford happens to be.
207—Columbus. Tod S. Raper, 77 Taylor Ave.
241—Cincinnati. D. W. Davidson, 1414 Vine St.
242—Bellefontaine. Harry E. Edselle, 328 Plumvalley St.
263—Toledo. F. P. Carey, Box 143, Station A.
264—Toledo. S. G. La Plante, 1820 Dunham St.
291—Ravenna. McGraw and Eckler.
292—Oberlin. E. A. Sherrill, Sherrill Acres, Chicago-Buffalo Highway, State Route No. 2.
Oklahoma—57—Haskell. Roy Holt.
225—Shawnee. A. M. Postlethwaite, 521 N. Beard St.
234—Blackwell. H. W. Willis, 204½ N. Main St.
Oregon—4—Salem. D. Wiggins.
286—Portland. W. C. Chapman, 24 Union Ave.
Pennsylvania—20—Philadelphia. Wm. A. Fulmer, 267 S. Ninth St.
21—Braddock. Clarence Jenkins, Union News Co.
24—Philadelphia. Alfred A. Krombach, 4159 N. Eighth Street, and Spring Mills Station, P. & R. Ry. Co., Montgomery County.
78—Pittsburgh. Peter C. Szarmach, 3030 Brereton St.
100—Philadelphia. Veterans of Foreign Wars, 926 N. 41st St.
182—Greensburg. Don Frederick Wermuth.
224—Oil City. J. M. Blair, 608 W. Front St.
247—Pittsburgh. J. F. Lichtenhaer, 224 Swope St.
248—Philadelphia. Carl D. Charles, 214 East St. Wissahickon.
261—Shippensberg. *The Chronicle*, 12 South Earl St.
South Dakota—179—Fairburn. Jesse K. Fell, *Custer County Press*.
270—Centerville. C. H. Hornbeck, *The Centerville Journal*.
South Carolina—97—Charleston. J. W. Mette, Navy Yard.
217—Charleston. J. H. Keener, 346 King St.
293—Florence. S. B. Stacey.
Tennessee—195—Knoxville. C. G. Pruden, 2024 Rose Ave.
Texas—33—Houston. J. M. Shamblin, 4805 Oakland St.
123—San Juan. D. L. Carter, Box 436.
134—Breckenridge. Joe Randel, 226 Baylor Avenue.
148—Port Arthur. Ralph C. Cornwell, 215 Eighth St.
174—San Angelo. E. M. Weeks, 24 West Eighth St.
183—South San Antonio. J. F. Nicodemus, Box 111, So. San Antonio Transfer.
218—Fort Worth. Robert Lentz, R No. 6 Box 73.
271—Harlingon. H. C. Jennings, Box 324.
280—Reese. L. H. Baker.
294—Coleman. Clyde Ransberger.
300—Pecos. Oram Green, Third and Cedar Sts.
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61—Burlington. Judge B. N. Albertson, Fairhaven Ave.
83—Seattle. Chas. D. Raymer, Raymer's Old Book-Store, 1330 First Ave.
154—Mt. Vernon. Miss Beatrice Bell, Western Washington Auto Club.
155—Olympia. B. F. Hume, Commercial Club Rooms.
172—Sunnyside. Mark Austin.
196—Arlington. F. T. Herzinger.
220—Sultan. George W. Snyder, Main St., opp. P. O.
281—Warm Beach. Paul E. Vollum and Kirkham Evans, Evans Bldg.
West Virginia—48—Huntington. John Geiske, 1682 Sixth St.
299—Fairmount. Dr. J. W. Ballard, 314 Main St.
Wisconsin—41—Madison. Frank Weston, 401 Gay Bldg.
Alaska—295—Ketchikan. Thwaites Photo Shop, Ingersoll Hotel Bldg., Front St.
Australia—39—Melbourne. William H. Turner, "Wolwoling" Keen St. Northcote; and Carters' and Drivers' Union, 46 William St.
76—Victoria. Chas. M. Healy, 30, The Avenue, Windsor Post, Dist. No. 8.
130—Brisbane. H. V. Shead, Sutton St., Kangaroo Pt.
235—Sydney. Phillip Norman, 842 Military Road, Nosman, Newtown.
278—Belgrave, Victoria. Raymond Paule, Carn Brea, Old Monbulk Road.
282—Melbourne. Thomas L. Winter, 81 William St. North Brighton.
Belgium—131—Antwerp. Reuben S. James, Place de l'Entrepot 3.
British Columbia—231—Stewart. Jack O'Shea, Ryan Bldg.
236—Vancouver. A. Johnson, 552-3 Hastings St.
Canada—31—Howe Sound, B. C. C. Plowden, Plowden Bay.
84—White Rock, B. C. Charles L. Thompson.
22—Burlington, Ontario. T. M. Waumsly, Jocelyn Bookstore.
4—Dunedin, P. E. Island. J. N. Berrigan.
29—Deseronto, Ontario. Harry M. Moore, *The Post Weekly*.
45—Norwood, Manitoba. Albert Whyte, 84 La Riviere St.
30—Winnipeg, Man. Walter Peterson, The Carleton Hotel, 216 Notre Dame Avenue.
62—Woodstock, Ontario. George L. Catton, 94 Metcalfe St.
85—Oshawa, Ontario. J. Worral, 6½ King St. E.
102—Amherst, Nova Scotia. Lloyd E. MacPherson, 5 Belmont St.
124—Hartshorn, Alberta. Leonard Brown, 33-34-17 W4M.
178—Moncton, N. B. Chas. H. McCall, 178 St. George St.
221—Montreal East. M. M. Campbell, 95 Broadway.
249—Fallowfield, Ontario. Ernest Armstrong.
250—Sault Ste. Marie. James McDonald, 504 Queen St. E.
276—Toronto, Ontario. N. Mackintosh, 82 East Richmond St.
277—Barrie, Ontario. R. F. Smith.
Canal Zone—37—Cristobal. F. E. Stevens.
156—Ancon. Arthur Haughton, Box 418.
China—222—Tientsin. Dr. George W. Twomey, 43 Rue de Amiraute.
Cuba—15—Havana. Ricardo N. Farres, Dominquez, 7 Cerro.
England—296—Longton, Stoke-on-Trent, Staffordshire. William Berry, 19 Weston Place, off Heathcote Road.
Egypt—173—Khartoum, Sudany. W. T. Moffat, Sudan Customs.
Germany—283—Dusseldorf. Hans Derrick Hulsmann, care R. A. Visser & Co.
Hawaiian Islands—170—Leilehua, Oahu, Château Shanty.
272—Honolulu, Hawaii. Hubert T. Miller, Room 4, Silent Hotel.
Honduras, C. A.—32—Galeras, Olancho. Dr. Wm. C. Robertson.
70—La Ceiba. Jos Buckly Taylor.
India—197—Calcutta. W. Leishman, 46 Wellesley St.
Mexico—68—Guadalajara, Jal. W. C. Money, Hotel Fenix, Calle Lopez, Cotilla Nos. 269 a 281.
Navy—71—U. S. *Arizona*. Elmer E. McLean.
Newfoundland—132—St. John's. P. C. Mars, Smallwood Bldg.
Nova Scotia—297—Dartmouth. W. E. Sievert, Portland St.
Porto Rico—46—Ensenada. M. B. Couch, P. O. Box 5.
Philippine Islands—198—Manila. W. W. Weston, De La Rama Bldg.

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Lost Trails, for finding missing relatives and friends, runs in alternate issues from "Old Songs That Men Have Sung."

Old Songs That Men Have Sung, a section of "Ask Adventure," runs in alternate issues from "Lost Trails."

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Ask Adventure

A Free Question and Answer Service Bureau of Information on Outdoor Life and Activities Everywhere and Upon the Various Commodities Required Therein. Conducted for *Adventure* Magazine by Our Staff of Experts.

QUESTIONS should be sent, not to this office, but direct to the expert in charge of the section in whose field it falls. So that service may be as prompt as possible, he will answer you by mail direct. But he will also send to us a copy of each question and answer, and from these we shall select those of most general interest and publish them each issue in this department, thus making it itself an exceedingly valuable standing source of practical information. Unless otherwise requested inquirer's name and town are printed with question; street numbers not given.

When you ask for *general* information on a given district or subject the expert may give you some valuable general pointers and refer you to books or to local or special sources of information.

Our experts will in all cases answer to the best of their ability, using their own discretion in all matters pertaining to their sections, subject only to our general rules for "Ask Adventure," but neither they nor the magazine assumes any responsibility beyond the moral one of trying to do the best that is possible. These experts have been chosen by us not only for their knowledge and experience but with an eye to their integrity and reliability. We have emphatically assured each of them that his advice or information is not to be affected in any way by whether a given commodity is or is not advertised in this magazine.

1. **Service free to anybody, provided self-addressed envelop and *full* postage, *not attached,* are enclosed. Correspondents writing to or from foreign countries will please enclose International Reply Coupons, purchasable at any post-office, and exchangeable for stamps of any country in the International Postal Union. Be sure that the issuing office stamps the coupon in the left-hand circle.**
2. **Send each question direct to the expert in charge of the particular section whose field covers it. He will reply by mail. Do NOT send questions to this magazine.**
3. **No reply will be made to requests for partners, for financial backing, or for chances to join expeditions. "Ask Adventure" covers business and work opportunities, but only if they are outdoor activities, and only in the way of general data and advice. It is in no sense an employment bureau.**
4. **Make your questions definite and specific. State exactly your wants, qualifications and intentions. Explain your case sufficiently to guide the expert you question.**
5. **Send no question until you have read very carefully the exact ground covered by the particular expert in whose section it seems to belong.**

Please Note: **To avoid using so much needed space each issue for standing matter and to gain more space for the actual meat of "Ask Adventure" the full statement of its various sections and of "Lost Trails" will be given only in alternate issues. In other issues only the bare names of the sections will be given, inquirers to get exact fields covered and names and addresses from full statement in alternate issues. Do *not* write to the magazine, but to the editors of the sections at their home addresses.**

1—3.	**The Sea. In Three Parts**
4—6.	**Islands and Coasts. In Three Parts**
7, 8.	**New Zealand and the South Sea Islands. In Two Parts**
9.	**Australia and Tasmania**
10.	**Malaysia, Sumatra and Java**
11.	**New Guinea**
12, 13.	**Philippine and Hawaiian Islands**
13—18.	**Asia. In Five Parts**
19—26.	**Africa. In Eight Parts**
27, 28.	**Turkey and Asia Minor**
29—34.	**Europe. In Six Parts**
35—37.	**South America. In Three Parts**
38.	**Central America.**
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	Standing Information

Gold Mining in New York State

THERE seems to be a chance that it might pay if conducted on a large enough scale:

Request:—"In a more or less sparsely settled section in this State (New York), not over fifty miles from this city, a German fellow bought a large farm for little more than a song about three years ago. He was rumored to be an experienced miner of the olden days in the West. He immediately started to wash gravel and the rumor traveled around the countryside that he was mining gold. However, as no gold had ever been mined in the State of New York every one began ridiculing him. This made him angry and he built a fence around his place and would allow no one on the place.

Now I have a cousin who lives about five miles from this German's farm and this German seemed to take a liking to the fellow. He told him in substance that he was making money mining gold and told him to look around his own farm and see what he could find. About that time I happened to go up to my cousin's place and he obtained permission for me to go and see the German's operations. He seemed a likable fellow and would volunteer quite a bit of information but if questioned would not give an answer. I know nothing about mining so will describe his equipment to you. He had a trough about twenty feet long and all over the bottom he had copper plates about two feet wide—the width of the trough—and three feet long and they were laid so they overlapped. At the upper end of the trough he had a box of dirt with a stream of water about an inch in diameter running in and down over the plates. He would coat the plates with mercury and stir the dirt up and in about ten minutes they would be golden yellow. Then he would scrape them off with a rubber scraper and put more mercury on and etc.

He told us that my cousin's place had the 'same kind of dirt' and advised us to not let people discourage us by telling us there was no gold in New York State but to look the place over. I looked at some of the dirt that the German was washing and it was just loam soil, but if held in bright sunlight very tiny golden-colored specks could be seen. He was not taking the dirt out of the ground but just off the top and had not gone more than four or five feet below the surface.

We went back to my cousin's place and started to dig on the gravelly side hill. This dirt also seemed to have tiny sparkling specks in and looked the same as the German's. When we got down about four feet there seemed to be a line of coarser gravel about six inches wide and this ran through the soil always about the same distance below the surface. We could find pockets in this gravel where the yellow specks could be seen very plainly. I took a sample of this gravel or loam from near the surface, a sample from one of the pockets and then we found a number of large boulders around the field and I chipped a piece from different ones that seemed to have yellow particles in them and sent the three samples in to the Government Assay Office at Salt Lake City and received the following value of gold to the ton of dirt:

Dirt from near the surface	$1.20 per ton
Dirt from pocket in gravel	$2.60 per ton
Samples of rock	$4.00 per ton

Are these values rich enough to be worked at a profit? If so what would it cost to equip an outfit to extract the gold from the dirt and also from the rock? If it would cost a large sum to equip, but same could be made to pay when properly equipped what would be the best way to interest the right kind of capital in same?

I was unable to find the ledge from which the boulders came from which I chipped the samples. As these samples I have mentioned were on top or near the top of the ground would it be likely to be richer down deeper? I washed some dirt myself by cleaning a copper plate with acid and coating with mercury. My plates colored all right but after I scraped the mercury and gold off had no way of separating them. How is this done? After this mercury and gold I had scraped off the plates had been carried around in a bottle for a few days it seemed to turn a more greenish color. What was the cause of that?

As we do not know a single thing about mining, any information you might be able to give us would be very much appreciated. I can get hold of about a hundred acres of land adjoining my cousin's place quite cheap and would like to find out if it would be advisable to purchase or not."—CARMON MILLER, Schenectady, N. Y.

Reply, by Mr. Victor Shaw:—It is not unlikely that there is gold in New York State, although you don't say just where this is, except that it is around fifty miles from Schenectady. The great "Laurentian Plateau," the rock of which is pre-Cambrian in point of geological time, and which practically covers Canada, has a long tongue which extends down into New York State. It is in these pre-Cambrian rocks that most of the rich mines in Quebec, Ontario, and other provinces have been discovered, including Cobalt and Porcupine, and the new strikes made recently in the Abitibi district. The place you mention may perhaps be included in this area, so if the metal found should be gold, this gives a reason why.

Next; you either should be very certain before you put any cash into this thing, either for purchases or for development, that these "tiny golden-colored specks" are in reality the gold they seem to be. There is, in Canada, an amber mica called "phlogopite," which in very minute particles resembles gold. Is it not a possibility that what you see in that top soil might be phlogopite, and *not* gold. This might be retained by mercury plates, in sufficient amounts to color it yellow, and so fool the "old mining man."

I should say, however, judging from your sample tests that there was gold in the dirt that would repay development, not by hand methods, but by hydraulicking, or working a dredge over large areas. Gold averaging forty to fifty cents a cubic yard may be handled thus at a profit.

Another point; your yellow specks might be a pyrite containing gold, and so you'd get a result in gold from a test. Pyrites often serve as a carrier for the gold. In fact, judging from your assay return, I should say this seems the most probable: especially since the assay of the rock sample shows higher in value. Perhaps the rock distintegrates and permeates the soil with these gold-bearing pyrites.

To work ground showing only what your assays show in value, you would need to reduce great quantities, as by dredging or hydraulical methods.

Your profit, or otherwise, depends solely upon the relative costs of operation; it may be your turns might show a profit in some localities and not in others, depending upon production-cost. You can not expect any one to commit himself as to this, unless he could see the ground and size up installation and operating costs. I should not like to say that a small sluice, using amalgamation plates, such as you say your German acquaintance is using, would show a reasonable profit, though he may not care how much his labor item stands him in. Get me?

Small sluicing operations on Seward Peninsula, Alaska, average 73c. per cubic yard of dirt. Dredges are working on ground averaging 51c. per cubic yard.

Your "boulders" may be ice-carried "erratics," brought from great distances.

Gold is retained by an amalgamation plate (because mercury has a chemical affinity for gold) until it resembles soft putty. When scraped off in this shape, a quantity is placed in a cast-iron retort and subjected to a cherry-red heat. The mercury vaporizes and is taken off and condensed, through a tube, and is used again, with some slight loss. It "is *all* vaporized, leaving a button of gold called a retort." This may be sold to any dealer, U. S. Assay Office, bank, or jeweler, by Troy weight at a price depending upon its fineness. It is then refined and the pure gold separated from whatever silver, copper and other dirt it may contain. These retorts are sold in small sizes and you could get one and experiment, figuring up your relative costs. If your plates turned greenish after standing, I should think it probable that you have gold-bearing pyrites, either iron or copper.

Names and addresses of department editors and the exact field covered by each section are given in the next issue of the magazine. Do not write to the magazine itself.

Homesteading in New Brunswick

IDEAL land for the man wanting to live in the open:

Request:—"I am farm raised (Mich.), married, twenty years of age. We are interested in homesteading in a timbered country, with a cool climate. We want to get away from autos, electric lights and walnut furniture and want fresh air and a bit of the world to ourselves instead.

We hope to make our start in the spring of 1926, we shall have between $1,000 and $2,000.

Do you consider this sufficient capital, providing we go slow? We are both used to work and expect plenty of it.

Is this country rolling or level, heavily timbered or otherwise; principal woods?

Is the climate much different from central Michigan? Principal crops and fruits? Would sheep be well adapted to climate? Is country watered by streams, lakes or both? Game and fish? Could one pick up a few dollars to help out trapping? Are game laws strict, or are they about the same as ours (Mich.)? What are New Brunswick's laws concerning homesteads and homesteaders, regulations and duties on goods brought in from the U. S.? Or to whom should I write for this information?

Where can I obtain a map of this region?

What would be the best route to New Brunswick from Detroit?

I would appreciate any suggestions or further information you might give.

I realize I am asking a great deal of time and trouble, however I am seriously interested and not inquiring from idle curiousity.

If by any chance this should be published please omit name. Please accept my sincere thanks for your time and attention."— —— ——.

Reply, by Major Belford:—I sympathize with your desire to get out in the open.

I note the amount of capital you will have and I am keeping it in mind in this letter. You can certainly make a fair start on $2,000.

The New Brunswick country is a rolling country. The wild lands are timbered with beech, maple, oak, elm, pine and spruce. The climate will be much the same as Central Michigan; the crops also would be the same as in that state. New Brunswick is an especially good potato country; sheep would do well.

The country is exceedingly well watered having many noble rivers fed by good streams. It is one of the game and fish paradises of the world. Trapping would be a useful help and you could pick up a good many dollars by that means.

Write to the Department of Mines, Fredericton, New Brunswick, for copies of the game laws, maps, regulations as to free grants and general information about the Province.

From Detroit to New Brunswick you would take the Canadian Northern Railway or the Canadian Pacific Railway.

I hope you will find this of some little help and if there is any further information please write me again.

Free service, but don't ask us to pay the postage to get it to you.

The World's Largest Island

WHERE vast areas still remain unexplored:

Request:—"Please send me general information about New Guinea: Hunting, people, customs, history, etc. Thank you in advance."—ERWIN B. CARTER, Clintonville, Wis.

Reply, by Mr. Armit:—You ask for "general information of New Guinea," which is rather a tall order! Don't you think so? But I will try and cram into the short space of this epistle all I can about your various questions; a short history of the great island would be hard to get into the space of one issue of our magazine. And the same remark applies to yonr other queries. However, here is something that may interest you.

Hunting. New Guinea is not much of a place for hunting as it is not well endowed with game like its sisters on the western side of Wallace's Line—the imaginary line laid down by the celebrated Alfred Russel Wallace, the equal of that master of science, Charles Darwin. Wallace found that the fauna of Asia extended only as far east as Borneo and some other islands in the Malay Archipelago. East of those islands the fauna of Australaisa has its stamping ground, and the largest game in this region is the kangaroo and other marsupials. New Guinea has the wallaby, a cousin of the kangaroo, many minor species of the same family, and the hog. There is nothing larger in the immense jungles that clothe the huge island other than the cassowary, which is a bird not unlike the emu of Australia. New Guinea has no dangerous animals, no monkeys; but she is well supplied with crocodiles—huge man-eaters that take toll of flesh from the savages that have their homes in the deltas of the numerous rivers. Crocodile shooting is fair sport, but the swamps are not exactly the sort of spots one goes to seek amusement in. Mosquitoes *plus* malaria make them worth keeping away from. Jungle hog provides good sport when the hunter takes a couple of good dogs with him to beat up the quarry. And the hog gives one a run for his money before he takes the count. A pig all his life yet he dies like a gentleman—fighting.

People. The island is populated by Melanesians. If you care to learn more about this branch of the human race, read "The Melanesians of British New Guinea," by Dr. C. G. Seligman, a text book published in London, England, and obtainable in most public libraries. The customs of these folk are detailed at length in this work. You will certainly learn some curious customs if you dip into this book.

History. New Guinea was first reported by two Portuguese mariners, Antonio Abreu and Francisco Serram, in 1511. Don Jorge de Meneses, the Portuguese governor of the island of Ternate, is said to have landed on the shores of the Mystery Island in 1526. Alvaro de Saavedra, a Spaniard, who was a kinsman of Cortes, the "burglar" of Mexico, coasted the island in 1528 and 1529, trying to get back home to Spain. He was of an inquisitive nature and is credited with the discovery of gold on the northern coast, which made him label the island "Isla del Oro" or Island of Gold.

Various world wanderers floated around the island in the centuries that followed the visits of the Portuguese and Spaniards. The chart shows their names attached to islands, capes, rivers, and bays, but little interest was taken in the island until the Great Powers had almost finished the partition of the older sections of the world. Then the eyes of three nations turned to New Guinea—England, Germany, and Holland. They came to an agreement and split the huge island almost equally between them in 1884. And so the white man came to push his way into the country. Then came the Great Disturbance of 1914—and Germany lost her section to the Australian Naval and Military Expeditionary Force on the surrender of Governor Haber to General Holmes in September, 1914. Thus Australia now has *two separate colonies in New Guinea*, the Territory of Papua, which she owns, and the Territory of New Guinea, which comprises the former German section, and which she administers by Mandate from the League of Nations. The Dutch still hold their section, the western, of the enormous island.

Miscellaneous. New Guinea leads the world in the number of her feathered denizens. And she has the honor of being the haunt of the birds of paradise —the most gorgeously plumed birds that command so much attention from females the wide world over. There are roughly some fifty-six species of the Paradisea, all magnificently plumed. If you visit the principal museums of New York or Chicago you will feast your eyes on some splendid specimens of these wonderful birds.

New Guinea is a vast island—the largest in the world—and is 1,490 miles long with a greatest width of 410 miles, and covers 312,329 square miles of surface. It is located to the north of Australia and is shaped not unlike a Chinese dragon. It is a volcanic country and possesses several active volcanoes. And it also owns some very fine glaciers! The latter are located in the vicinity of Mount Caerstenz in the Snow Mountains of the Dutch colony.

Hope the foregoing will interest you.

Address your question direct to the expert in charge, NOT to the magazine.

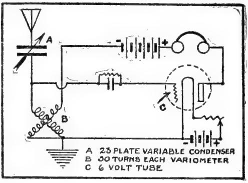
Radio Sets

"DISTANCE," and how to get it:

Request:—"Can a single stage of radio frequency amplification be added to wiring diagram attached? If this can be done without doing away with the principle of tuning, will you please add same for me? Also please say what kind of a transformer you would advise using.

If you see anything you think would help out on the wiring diagram, say so. Always open for suggestions of any kind. Biggest fault at present is that it howls too much, and when you pick up your station and reduce a battery current, station will jump off.

This set did not howl when first made, stations came in like a ton of brick, but of late has howled. Any suggestions will be appreciated. Envelope and postage enclosed. If this goes to *Adventure* please use initials."—C. A. R., Indianapolis, Ind.



Reply, by Mr. McNicol:—The circuit you have does not lend itself readily to adding radio frequency. Why not add two stages of audio frequency to what you have? This would give you loud speaker volume, and with a 150-foot antenna you should be able to reach out 600 or 700 miles with it under average conditions.

If you add A. F. use Amertran No. 6 and Amertran No. 7, transformers: No. 6 first stage and No. 7 second stage. Best tubes would be 201A in each of the A. F. stages.

The howling you get now that did not originally appear is likely due to the increase in the number of broadcasting stations. Multiplicity of carrier waves are causing just this trouble very widely.

Where the Old West Lingers

COWTOWNS where lead poisoning is not unknown today:

Request:—"I am a regular reader of *Adventure*: thus my knowledge of your name and address; and of all the stories I enjoy, I like those which feature *Hashknife Hartley* and *Sleepy Stevens*. I don't like to read about the west of the old days, it's gone and the modern west is taking its place.

Now can you give me some information? I know they have all the modern vehicles of transportation and all the other new improvements, but:

Are there any unfenced ranges where they have their yearly roundups?

Are there any cowtowns like *Adventure* mentions? Do the cowboys still wear the specified guns as in the old days?

Do they still come to town like the stories tell us?

And last of all, can you tell me where there are some good ranches that I could write to for some pictures?

This is a long letter for you to answer but these things have always bothered me because I feel that in a few years the ranches will be gone and the help, in white collars and ties, will be riding in machines, and we will no longer get a thrill reading about the ranges of the old days."—Harold Ford, Philadelphia, Pa.

Reply, by Mr. Harriman:—Do not be too sure about the old west being gone. I can show you scads of ranches where they still run things exactly as they did fifty years ago, only the old man is apt to go to town in a 60 H.P. auto, rather than on a cayuse.

In 1920 I helped rope and brand cattle on such a ranch. That same year I talked with a bunch of waddies who had gathered for the fall roundup in northern Arizona and were cursing their luck because a foot of snow had fallen. Why, boy, what do you know about the west anyhow?

I know a cowboy who left Shell, Wyoming, and rode for eight days. He only saw six men in the whole trip, outside of a few in two tiny hamlets and four or five in three ranch houses.

I have ridden a horse all day in Utah and did not encounter a fence of any kind. There were 30,000 sheep on the plain I crossed and 65,000 cattle in the mountains where I slept that night. Everything was precisely as it had been forty or fifty years ago.

Yes, there are unfenced ranges galore, where they have roundups.

Yes, there are cowtowns where a man can get lead poisoning if he acts ugly or mean. I went to one in 1920. Six men shot the first day of the rodeo there. Is that woolly enough for you?

In Arizona a man is supposed to get rid of his gun within twenty minutes of getting into a town—State law. In New Mexico they wear them any old place they go. In Wyoming it is half and half.

Cowboys will always go to town when they get a chance, but shooting up towns has become unpopular and so many townmen own pump shotguns and keep buckshot shells, that it is risky. Anyhow, the percentage of fools among cowmen is never half as great as some writers try to get you to believe. I never even had one talk ugly to me. Fine fellows.

What kind of pictures do you want to get? Those that show the roping, branding, etc.? Not one ranch in a hundred would have any such and not for sale purposes at any rate. The place to get these is in some town in the cattle country and I don't know the firm names.

Don't you believe the ranches will all be gone. There will be lots of them in 2924.

Lots of land only fit for ranches and folks will eat beef.

Hints for Big Game Hunters

COMPARATIVE merits of double-barreled and magazine rifles for tiger-shooting:

Request:—"I am contemplating a trip to India in the near future. Please answer the following questions, and send me bill if there is a charge for this service.

Recently I handled a double-barreled rifle and fell very much in love with this type. Are they accurate? How do they compare with the Springfield? What do they weigh? I have been informed by a firearms "expert" that they do not compare with a magazine rifle in efficiency? Is this so? I want one for tiger—I mean a double. What caliber would you suggest?

What pistol would you take? What shotgun? What size shot?

Any information you could give me on the above will be greatly appreciated.—F. W. Koles, Biloxi, Miss.

Reply, by Capt. Giddings:—I can quite understand your falling in love with the double-barreled rifle. Made by one of England's best gunmakers, it is a really magnificent weapon and one in which the sportsman finds a never-ending delight.

I know positively from personal experimentation that the best double-barreled rifle is not so accurate as the Springfield or certain match rifles manufactured in this country. On the other hand the double-barrel as made by an expert gunmaker will shoot as accurately as you can hold from the various positions one assumes in firing during a hunting trip. As regards accuracy, you, I assert, will never know the difference between a well-made "double" and the Springfield in hunting at ranges under three hundred yards, provided both guns are of the same caliber. You could not, of course, compare a double .450 with the .30 Springfield for trajectory; the former bullet has many times the drop or trajectory of the flat-shooting Springfield at 300 yards.

For tiger I would recommend a double-barreled rifle made by Holland & Holland, Purdy, Rigby, Lang, or any other of the top-notch English gunmakers, in caliber ranging from .375 Magnum (300 grain bullet) to the .470. It has been my experience that the "two shots quick" gun is superior to the magazine rifle in hunting all kinds of dangerous game. Aside from the frequent mal-functions of magazine arms in large calibers, I dislike the noisy "clank clank" of the bolt or lever in functioning, and the relatively slow speed of the following, or second shot.

Tigers and lions charge with amazing rapidity. Unless one is entirely without nerves and a wizard with a magazine rifle, two shots are all that can be effectively gotten in. And in delivering these two shots rapidly and efficiently no other arm can compare with the two-barreled rifle, in my opinion.

The double or medium and large caliber will weigh from eight and one-half pounds to twelve pounds, sometimes more. I shot a double-barrel chambered for the well-known Rigby .350 which weighed eight and three-fourths pounds but which was so beautifully balanced that it actually felt lighter than my 7 mm. Mauser. Nevertheless, it is my opinion that the double rifle of .300 to .400 caliber can be built much lighter—and still be quite safe—than the English gunmakers are building them at present. The recoil might be somewhat increased, it is true, but in hot countries I should prefer recoil to weight.

The right barrel is the master barrel and even from a machine rest the left barrel shoots somewhat off, no matter how expert the maker, the amount varying with the range, intensity of cartridge, design of bullet, etc. At ordinary shooting ranges for which the particular cartridge is designed this off-shooting by the left barrel will be of no consequence in the field.

I am partial to the 9 mm. Luger as a sidearm when hunting dangerous game on account of its greater penetration. Not that I consider any type of pistol will take the place of the rifle, but one occasionally has use for the sidearm in a pinch. Several Americans who hunt much in Africa have discarded the .45 Auto Colt for the Luger, having found that the .45 lacks penetration

For a shotgun I would recommend a high grade L. C. Smith or Fox, two shotguns with which I am familiar. They should have either 28- or 30-inch barrels—the latter pair points better; with two and three-fourths-inch chambers, both full choke, and 20 gage. I like the Western Super X two and three-fourths-inch shell, shooting an ounce of shot for large fowl. In shot, fives should do for peafowl and sixes for jungle cock. Take along a supply of shells loaded with the solid 20-gage ball, in case of the unexpected tiger. A friend in India reports having made a splendid load by first waxing a lethal ball and inserting it in the ordinary Super X case, after having taken out the shot. These lethal balls are made with flanges of soft metal on the surface of the ball which allows them to be shot out of a full-choked gun. Any English dealer can supply you with these balls. Just ask for "Lethal 20-gage balls."

I have gotten to the point where I offer you the above with the utmost diffidence, though it comes as the result of personal experience and observation. I have had my arguments, my experience and that of my friends and comrades, set at naught by certain ballistic and firearm experts, who showed me on paper just how foolish my arguments and claims for the double-barrel, the Luger and certain cartridges were. The fact that these guns have been in the hands of thousands of sportsmen for many years and performed satisfactorily seems to be of no significance. Last winter in Chicago I heard the double-barreled rifle denounced as being a relic of a bygone age—something left behind, far behind, in the march of progress. Not being a ballistic engineer nor an expert on firearms I did not go beyond venturing the remark that this type of weapon had served me pretty well during a somewhat hectic decade.

I think we of *Ask Adventure* service try to give you largely the results of our actual experiences in the countries we handle, whether it applies to guns or employment or whatever the desideratum. We have no ax to grind—no particular brand of firearms, shells or equipment to foist upon you.

There is no charge for this service. It is a pleasure to answer questions set out so clearly as yours.

When you get something for nothing, don't make the other fellow pay the postage on it.

The Belgian Congo

ANYTHING but a health resort:

Request:—"I have an opportunity offered me by a firm to go down to the Belgian Congo (West Africa), alternating between the towns of Matadi and Kinshassa on the Congo River, with most of my time spent at Matadi for a period of two years or more if desired.

Any information you could give me, especially as regards outfitting, climate as it affects whites, and living conditions, would be greatly appreciated."— —— ——.

Reply, by Mr. Simpson:—The Belgian Congo is a bit out of my territory, which extends only as far as Calabar, but I can at least tell you this much; that a two-year stretch on the West Coast of Africa is too long. I would not advise any man to try to do more than a year at a time, with at least four months rest at home between trips.

I should imagine the firm that sends you out would give you all the information you desire about an outfit that would be in keeping with the kind of job you are going to hold down.

The weather in West Africa is of two kinds. It rains a lot between March and October or thereby, and it doesn't rain at all the rest of the time. But it's always hot. The climate, as may be gathered from the first paragraph of this letter, is very bad. And there's no use wrapping up that fact in any kind of silver paper to make it look better than it is. White men can stand it—a little at a time—and even that is sometimes too much. This is not intended to discourage but to caution. No man can fool with West Africa—any part of it—and not pay for the privilege.

Living conditions vary in different localities. But I assume you will "live in" at the firm's headquarters and this, as a general thing, is comfortable enough. Discomfort begins when you have to do a lot of trudging and camping out in the bush. Just by way of a few general hints:

Select your sun-helmet very carefully; as big and as light a helmet as you can get.

See that your rain coat is a really good one. Rain boots, too.

Don't stint on the uniform cases you buy. Get them strong, air-tight and white-ant-proof.

Don't take anything of leather except shoes and a belt. Leather is not much good for anything in the tropics.

Don't take anything you really value with you. The natives will steal it sooner or later.

Be careful to avoid night chills.

In spite of all other advice to the contrary, leave liquor severely alone. Concentrate on quinine.

Don't rush. Don't get excited. A quiet mind and an even, steady pace in all things is perhaps the best advice I can give any man who hopes to beat the game on the West Coast of Africa.

Good luck to you!

Old Songs That Men Have Sung

Devoted to outdoor songs, preferably hitherto unprinted—songs of the sea, the lumber-camps, Great Lakes, the West, old canal days, the negro, mountains, the pioneers, etc. Send in what you have or find, so that all may share in them.

Although conducted primarily for the collection and preservation of old songs, the editor will give information about modern ones when he can do so and *IF* all requests are accompanied with self-addressed envelop and reply postage (*NOT* attached). Write to Mr. Gordon direct, *NOT* to the magazine.

Conducted by R. W. GORDON, 4 Conant Hall, Cambridge, Mass.

ANOTHER song that I'd like to know a great deal more about is the famous "Casey Jones." This song in the form in which it is commonly sung today is the product of Eddie Newton and T. Lawrence Siebert, and was copyrighted by them in 1909. They did not, however, originate the song, but merely made a new version built upon older material. Much of this material was in the form of scattered stanzas, some of which dealt with Jay Gould and not with Casey Jones at all.

There is even some debate as to whether or not there ever was an actual Casey Jones, though it is almost certain that before the time of Newton and Siebert these scattered verses had formed themselves into something like a regular song dealing with an actual wreck. Where and when this wreck occurred, and who the engineer was, are questions not yet satisfactorily answered.

Then immediately following the version of Newton and Siebert, dozens of other stanzas and versions sprang up, built in turn upon their work. These were largely the work of various railroad men.

The whole history is very complicated, and I'm turning to you for help. Send in as many versions or stray verses as you can, and state as accurately as possible when you heard them, and where. Tell me all you can about the wreck, or about Casey himself, but be sure to distinguish between facts that you know to be facts and mere hearsay. Both are of value but they should not be mixed.

Again, I'll make the same offer I made in the case of "Frankie and Johnny." A six months subscription to the reader sending in *within one month* the most helpful reply to this call for information!

THE two best articles I know on the history appeared in the *Railroad Man's Magazine* in 1911-12 from which I reprint through the courtesy of the Frank A. Munsey Co., the first two versions below. My third version which differs slightly from one given in the articles above referred to, comes from Mr. C. H. Street of Kenosha, Wisconsin.

Original Casey Jones

Come all you rounders, I want you to hear
The story told of an engineer.
Old Casey Jones was the rounder's name,
A high right-wheeler of mighty fame.

Caller called Jones about half past four;
He kissed his wife at the station door,
Climbed into the cab with his orders in his hand
And says, "This is my trip to the Holy Land."

Through the South Memphis yards on the fly,
He heard his fire-boy say, "You've got a white eye!"
And all the switchmen knew by the engine's moans
That the man at the throttle was old Casey Jones.

It had been raining some five or six weeks,
The railroad track looked like the bed of a creek.
They loaded him down to a thirty-mile gait,
And threw the southbound mail about eight hours late.

Fireman hollered, "Casey, you're going too fast!
You run a block-board the last station we passed!"
"Yes," says Casey, "but I think we'll make it through,
For she is steaming better than I ever knew."

Jones said, "Fireman, don't you fret!
Keep knocking at that firebox; don't give it up yet.
For I am going to run her till she leaves the rail,
Or make it on time with the Southern mail."

Around the curve and over the dump
Two locomotives were bound to bump.
Firemen hollered, "Jonesie, she's right ahead!
We might jump and make it, but we'll all be dead!"

Around the curve he spied a train,
Reversing his engine caused the bell to ring.
Fireman jumped off, but Casey stayed on—
Was a good engineer, but he's dead and gone!

Old Casey Jones, he was all right,
He stuck to his duty both day and night.
They loved to hear his whistle and the ring of No. 3,
As he came into Memphis on the old I. C.

Headaches and backaches, and all kinds of pain
Are not apart from a railroad train;
Tales that are earnest, noble, and grand
Are all in the life of a railroad man.

Casey Jones

By a section man

Come all you dagos if you want to hear
A story of a real good engineer.
Casey Shannon was the hero's name
On a dinky line, boys, he won his fame.

Casey was known throughout the run
To shine his engine when his work was done;
And every one knew by the engine's whine
When Casey ran on the dinky line.

Through the Marchfield yards he let her speed,
Eating up coal with hoggish greed.
He looked at his watch, trembled, and said,
"We shall make it, but we'll all be dead!"

Casey pulled up into something burg,
And No. 10 was hitting the curve.
Casey said, "Boys, you'd better jump,
'Cause there's two big engines that's going to bump!"

Casey said before he died,
"There were two more engines that he'd like to ride."
Miller asked, "Which may they be?"
"The nine-ninety-seven and the six-thirty-three."

Casey Jones

By a negro

Casey looked out and saw that cow,
He tried to stop, but couldn't, somehow.
He said to the boy, "We are going to bump,
And while there's time you had better jump!"

"All right, boss," the boy replied,
And left the cab by the door in the side.
When the wreck was cleared, poor Casey was dead,
But the boy got up, half crazy, and said:

"Now all you ramblers in mourning go,
For the prince of ramblers is lying low;
And all you maidens that love the name
Put on your mourning veils again!"

That's enough to show how varied the song is today, and how complicated its history. Every scrap of information that any one of you can send in will be appreciated.

AND before it's too late to obtain them, the "Blues" ought to be collected and preserved. Owing to the modern fad for "Blues" and the consequent production of imitations, the old and genuine specimens are being forgotten or becoming hopelessly confused with the new and the spurious. The Blues form a distinct type of song, curious and interesting not only for the words but for the strange wailing music. The following example is, I think, genuine. I wish I could add the music, which gives it most of its effectiveness. It came to me through a friend who had captured it from negro singing. Send in more of them.

The Train I Ride

(Text of W. F., Berkeley, California.)

When a woman gits de blues she lays down an' c-r-y-s,
When a man gits de blues he takes a freight train an' r-i-d-e-s.
Oh, de train ah ride,
Oh, de train ah ride,
Is sixteen coaches
Ah mean coaches—
Oh, de train I ride
Is sixteen c-o-a-c-h-e-s l-o-n-g.

SEND all contributions of old songs and all questions concerning them direct to R. W. GORDON, 4 Conant Hall, Cambridge, Massachusetts. DO NOT send them to the magazine.

THE TRAIL AHEAD

JUNE 30TH ISSUE

THE FIGUREHEAD A Complete Novelette
He had the soul of a jackal in the body of a lion. ***Georges Surdez***

VENGEANCE A Complete Novelette
Sigmund waited long for it. ***Arthur Gilchrist Brodeur***

THE CORRUPTION OF DEACON MUNDEN
A Complete Novelette ***Charles Victor Fischer***
He was a peace-loving man, but his ribs were ticklish.

THE PURSUIT ***George Bruce Marquis***
The Indian scout knew a thing or two.

PARTS A Five-Part Story Part IV ***Hugh Pendexter***
The *Pilgrim* finds himself.

THE SETTING OF SUNRISE ***Alex. McLaren***
He essayed assaying but found something better to do.

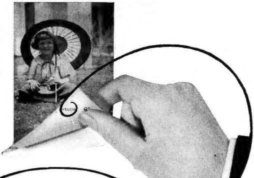
TERLEGAPHY AND THE BRONC ***Alan LeMay***
When a horse won't—he won't!

WOLVES OF THE SEA ***F. St. Mars***
When the grampus dives things begin to happen.

TEN MINUTES ***Erle D. Hosmer***
The fruit of intemperance on a banana plantation.

Still Farther Ahead

THE three issues following the next will contain *long* stories by Georges Surdez, Thomson Burtis, Leonard H. Nason, J. Allan Dunn, George E. Holt, Everett Saunders, John Murray Reynolds, Frederick Moore and Walter J. Coburn; and short stories by S. B. H. Hurst, Nevil Henshaw, Alan Le May, Fred F. Fleischer, Rolf Bennett, Michael J. Phillips, Ralph R. Perry, Captain Mansfield, Chester T. Crowell, Alanson Skinner, L. Paul, Fairfax Downey, Royce Brier, Bill Adams and others; stories of aviators in the oilfields, pirates on the Spanish Main, bandits in Bosnia, French troopers in Africa, bullies in the Cajan country, British dragoons in France, cowboys on the Western Range, traders in the South Seas, desert riders in Africa, revolutionists in Central America, lumberjacks in the North Woods, hardcase skippers on the high seas, Indian detectives on the reservation, bluejackets with the Atlantic fleet, adventurers the world around.



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